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DR EDITH ROMNEY

A Nobel

[Original. Eldest]



IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. I.

LONDON

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DR EDITH ROMNEY.

CHAPTER I.

OVER THE WINE.

“Novelty is only in request.”

Measure for Measure.

THE May evening was so mild that the windows of Dr. Fullagher's dining-room had been left open. Near one of them sat the doctor and his guest, between them a small table with decanters and glasses and cigars. It was twilight. With a congenial companion the doctor cared not how long he sat in the melancholy hour between the lights—when alone he much preferred the brilliancy of gas or lamp. The air was still and soft, so still that the white curtains were hardly stirred. The window opened on to the garden, where the paths, the flowers, the trees at the end, and each object, were becoming indistinct and uniform in neutral tints. Over

the trees, two lilacs and one graceful laburnum, looked the crescent moon—pale, fair, and distant. Within the room there still lingered enough light near the window to enable the two men to pour out their wine, to light their cigars, and to see each other's face.

They lounged opposite each other in great easy-chairs—content, comfortable, with that soothing sense of repose and well-being induced by an excellent dinner and the fumes of fragrant smoke. The host, a man of sixty, tall, stout, grey-haired, and large-limbed, amply filled his seat. He was large in face and feature also, with plenty of hair, and a long grey beard flowing over his breast in two ragged locks—a beard which did the doctor good service as a mode of expression, for he had tricks of handling those long locks corresponding in vigour and variety to every change of his impulsive temper. His complexion was florid, his eye-brows bushy, his blue eyes rather small, but capable of much expression; his brow high and noble, while the lower part of his face was heavy and coarse. A face of contradictions—attractive, in spite of its want of beauty, and yet, at times, slightly repellent. In the course of a long and hard-working life, however, the attractiveness—a charm and force in the man himself—had exercised by far the

greater influence over people, and won for him a fair measure of success and popularity.

His guest was younger by some twenty-five years. He was tall and broad-shouldered, well-knit in figure, with no superfluous flesh upon his large bones. He was dark and sunburnt, wearing neither beard nor whisker, only a thick, drooping moustache. He was a handsome man, with dark level brows, a straight nose, dark deep-set eyes, a fine chin, and a proud and easy carriage of the head. His careless, lounging attitude was graceful, and the rough grey suit sat well upon him,—Dr. Fullagher was a bachelor, and the traveller had been spared the trouble of evening dress. This was their first meeting after six years, and they had had much to say; but now a short pause ensued.

Dr. Fullagher removed his cigar from his lips, deliberately and with epicurean enjoyment disposed of a glass of port, replaced his cigar, uncrossed and recrossed his legs, and settling his head comfortably in a new position, turned his eyes upon the dark handsome face which leaned back with half-shut eyelids opposite.

“Well, now you’ve had your fling, Fane,” he said, “been everywhere and seen the world all round, I suppose you’ll be thinking of settling down.”

"No, I'm not thinking of it," said Fane, lazily.

"Don't you think it's time you did?"

"Oh, I'm in no hurry."

"It's about time you were. A man who wants to make a practice and get on ought to turn to when he can still call himself young."

"I suppose so. But the prospect of settling down is not a cheerful one."

"You can't spend your days wandering the devil knows where. And this loss you were mentioning — of course it will affect your income?"

"It carries with it a full third," said Fane.

"The loss of a third of one's income strikes me as a pretty strong argument to induce a man to supplement it by work," said the doctor, dryly.

"I'm afraid I shall find it so," in a resigned tone. "It will hasten the evil day when I must stick myself down to one place and grub for a living. But I have seen no place yet that I should care to spend my days in."

"What do you say to Wanningster?"

"Here? No room," said Fane, laconically.

"It's not a bad town, and it's easy to work. There's plenty of money in the place."

"I'm glad to hear it for your sake. But I

can't very well come and scramble for it with you. You have too great a hold in the town for a rival to have any chance against you."

Dr. Fullagher uttered an inarticulate grunt, and poured himself out another glass of wine.

"Have some more claret, Fane. I still stick to my old friend."

"More of an enemy than a friend, I fear," said Fane.

Fullagher pulled a rueful grimace and softly caressed his leg.

"It plays the deuce with me now and then. But what can I expect? I'm getting old and must pay for my youth. Abstaining from my favourite wine would be a heavy and utterly disproportionate price to pay for a possible year or two's longer infirmities."

"Perhaps you're right," said Fane, as he helped himself and shot a quick professional glance at the other. "There is more than a year or two's life in you yet, doctor. You have not changed in these half-dozen years."

"I am certainly stouter, and my fits of gout are rather more frequent. But I am glad to hear you say so."

"By-the-by," said Austin, abruptly, "have you retired?"

"What makes you ask?"

"Because you have not once been interrupted this evening. That is a slight difference to old times! How that wretched bell used to go! One couldn't have you for half-an-hour together."

"I perceive a difference myself," said Fulagher, quaintly.

"Grant said something about your retiring—"

"Did the ass?" The doctor stroked his beard meditatively and took a few whiffs at his cigar. "H'm. On the whole I'm as well pleased that story should be the one to get about. It is more dignified to retire than to—be retired from. Yes, George Grant, your delicate way of putting matters pleases me. I've 'retired.' I must confess the ingenious expression never once occurred to me." The doctor smiled at the mystified surprise on his companion's face. "We are all mortal, Fane."

"What has that to do with it?"

"It is only another way of saying we are all subject to change—and to changes. You don't think me altered; I don't feel any more infirm than I did five, or even ten, years ago; I have good work in me yet, but my patients evidently think otherwise, and so I have 'retired.' Except for a small remnant—chiefly members of my own sex—that still remains faithful to me, I do no work."

“I had no idea of this. I’m very sorry. What an ungrateful set the people of this town must be! Why, you must have worked amongst them for over twenty years.”

“Twenty-five. The length of time is one reason, I fancy. Wanningster has changed greatly during those years. When I first came it was a dull, sleepy, dead-alive place, with no more idea of progress or enterprise than I have of waltzing. The last twelve years have worked wonders,” he went on. “Really, I expect you will hardly know the place. The manufactures had a time of great prosperity. Men who used to make their modest hundreds and were content to live in the town, now make their thousands, and have large houses in the country, and have their clubs and their late dinners; for with wealth their ideas have enlarged in proportion. The town is almost a third as large again; it is extending its borders on every side. We have some really respectable public buildings. And the people are as much changed as the place. They are quite in the swim; quite in the foremost ranks of enlightenment and progress. I, being old-fashioned and ignobly unaffected by the march of improvement, am, as a natural consequence, left behind. My diploma, unfortunately, does not bear the date of one of the

last three years; I am weighed in the balance, and found wanting. Therefore, my kingdom is divided, and devilishly unfairly too."

"By Jove! you take it calmly too!"

"Do I? I *can* rant about it; before you go you may perhaps hear a specimen of my powers in that line. Don't imagine the loss of work impoverishes me. I have made enough to enable me to live as comfortably as I care to live until I go over to the majority. I can keep on the same house and a horse, buy as much port as I want, and put up with David's exquisite but expensive cookery. You have detected no signs of poverty about the place, have you?—no broken windows, or holes in the carpets?"

"I wasn't thinking of the money. Twenty-five years of a capital practice like yours ought to have feathered your nest pretty warmly. No; the hard part must be to be quietly shelved by other people."

"That's so. You show a fine perception, my friend."

"None of the other doctors had a chance against you. Has a new man come to the town?"

"Dr. Romney."

"Romney—Romney," repeated Fane. "Wasn't there a Dr. Romney in L—?" naming a neighbouring town.

“He’s dead. This doctor is a member of his family.”

“And he’s the bright and shining light that has eclipsed you with your age and experience?”

“Exactly,” replied the doctor. “My experience and age and worth have gone like wax before the modern training and latest ideas of this brilliant young doctor. Dr. Romney is in the fashion, and much run after, I assure you. That is why I suggested Wanningster; although at first glance I admit the reason does not seem apparent. There is scope here. The town is growing rapidly; the people are much richer. You belong to modern times. You are a man of the world, and would suit them. They take readily to any one new—”

“And just as readily forsake them!” exclaimed Fane. “If they are as changeable as you say, they would throw me over as quickly as this other man as soon as a still newer man appeared.”

“I don’t think so,” said Dr. Fullagher with a quiet smile of confidence.

“If I settle down it must be with some hope at least of being able to keep as much practice as I make,” said the other with a little irritation.

"You have every chance here," said Fullagher, in the same tone of calm assurance. "I ought to know, after living here for a quarter of a century. I have taken the fools' measure to a hair's-breadth. I am well posted up in Wanningster politics, no man in the town as well, I dare say, unless it's that drivelling idiot, Milward, who knows about every one; and I foresee a splendid practice for you, larger and richer than mine in its best days."

"And in another breath you tell me the people are capricious!"

"Quite so," was the cool reply. "Far be it from me to stint them of their due. My dear fellow, let me explain. Regarding them with a professional eye, I perceive that they are in a period of transition. You come and bring them safely through it. You will suit them exactly. You have every advantage of personal appearance and charm of manner, and of having been everywhere, and seen everything. You are a man of the world, and know how to manage men and women—don't forget the women, by the Lord!—they are the chief source of one's income, as I have found out to my cost. You will win them, their money, their respect and admiration, and they will remain submissively faithful to you. And why?" Fullagher leaned forward and laid an

impressive grasp upon his beard. "Because affairs are too unnatural and exceptional to last. Dr. Romney, Fane—Dr. Romney is not the *son*, but the daughter, of Hugh Romney."

"The devil!" exclaimed Fane, pausing in the act of striking a light to gaze incredulously into the other's face.

"No, worse," said Fullagher, nodding gently—"a woman."

"A lady-doctor in Wanningster?—and successful?" said Fane in slow amazement. "Why, the people must be crazy!" he added contemptuously.

"Ah, I thought you were conservative in such matters. I calculated on your not believing in them."

Austin laughed scornfully.

"Believe in them? I think they are monstrosities!—everything that is unwomanly and odious! I cannot bear to think of a woman stepping out of her proper sphere and thrusting herself into strife with men. It is degrading to her."

"Quite so. I agree with you entirely."

"And you mean to say that this—this woman has positively taken your practice from you—you, the oldest doctor in the town?"

"The women and children, certainly—the

best of one's practice," said Dr. Fullagher ruefully.

"Good heavens ! what fools people are !"

"One hardly needed this extreme proof, though," said the doctor, with a jerk of laughter. "The explanation is simple, extremely simple. As I have already told you, Wanninger has made immense strides the last few years. It hungrily swallows every new fashion—women's rights, æstheticism, cookery and ambulance classes, and I don't know what. When in this state of yawning voracity it was not likely to strain at so small a trifle as a lady-doctor. No. She came at the right moment, and Wanninger greedily accepted her. Mrs. Stanforth, the rector's wife, employed her from the first, and that went a long way. Our great lady, Mrs. Lorimer, took her up, and her patronage finished the business. The rest of my best patients followed like a flock of geese. The Harveys, a whole clan in themselves, employ her, and their connection is a valuable dissenting one. That addle-headed Milward, who is always nibbling at some fad in science or art, took her under his ample wing, and introduced her to the Chutterworths—"

"They are nobodies, anyway. I've heard you talk about them."

"You mistake," exclaimed the doctor. "They

are great people now. He has built himself a huge, unwieldy house two miles out of town, which he proudly terms a mansion, and which is built, so he says, in the form of a h'L—for dining late has not made any difference in the placing of his aspirates. He has given me many a laugh over his house and grounds, for the idiot expects every one to be as greatly interested in every detail of the place as he is himself. For instance, it was soothing to know he employed "three gardeners and an 'elper," and that, to gratify Stanforth's eye when dining there, he intended to put up a large Scriptural picture over the side-board—subject, 'The Canterbury Pilgrims.'"

Fane threw back his head and laughed aloud. "What heartless fiend let him in for that? Did you, Fullagher?"

"No. I only wish I could take credit for it. I should be a prouder man this day. No, it was the brilliant suggestion of Scott, the architect, who seems to be as thorough in general ignorance as the noble Chutterworth himself. I applauded the idea, certainly, but I did not originate it."

"It is odd such a man should be so 'advanced,' as you term it, as to employ a lady-doctor," said Fane, with a sneer.

"Two powerful reasons," said Dr. Fullagher, smiling shrewdly. "First and foremost, he yearns to be in 'society'—Wanningster's best, you know. He is doing everything he can to push himself and his family into it. As Miss Romney was taken up by the best people, he would not be behindhand, so he ordered his wife to send for her; and, much against her will, the poor woman did so. She is one of those ignorant, narrow-minded people who dread innovation as they dread spiders. Had railways been invented in her life-time she would never have entered a train."

"Yes. Lady-doctors can never be really successful, for they will not be able to overcome the prejudices of the poor. The poor make a firmer foundation for a practice than the rich."

"That is generally true. I began with the poor, but I let 'em drop as soon as I could. I loathe poor people," said the doctor, raising his glass to his lips. "'Low, vile, abominable wretches,' as a fellow-student of mine used to call them. It was amusing to hear Mrs. Chutterworth's almost tearful protest next time I happened to meet her. 'Don't go for to think as it's me as is turnin' of you off, doctor, for it ain't anything of the sort. You've always sooted me' (here I made my best bow), 'and if even you

are a bit elderly and old-fashioned, behind the times, as they say' (this candid betrayal of public opinion made me enjoy myself thoroughly), 'what does it matter? It stands to reason you must know better what's the matter with folks than a lady, however clever she may be, and however many letters she may tack on to her name. I don't feel 'appy about it, doctor, and if it wasn't that Joel is as firm set about things as he takes into his head as his own factory, I wouldn't give in to givin' of you h'up.' She suggested that I should occasionally 'look in as a friend,' and more than hinted I should supplement Miss Romney's advice by my own moss-grown wisdom. I shook my head and said 'Impossible,' somewhat sharply. Next time I saw her she was kind enough to set my mind at rest by telling me she had got over her fears, and quite believed that her new doctor understood her business."

Fane gave himself an impatient fling and uttered an ejaculation of disgust.

"What is Chutterworth's other motive?"

Dr. Fullagher's eyes twinkled. "Meanness, my dear fellow, meanness. He spends ostentatiously, but he likes to save when it is possible, and he is especially fond of screwing it out of people who do work for him. I got a shrewd

suspicion as to the workings of his noble mind on the subject a few days after the momentous change. He was here to ask a few questions about himself,—the poor devil has heart disease,—and he mentioned the fact that Miss Romney had been called in by his wife half apologetically. ‘It’s a queer thing for a woman to do,’ said he, ‘but the best families are beginning to employ her, and I don’t see any reason, hang it, why I shouldn’t profit by it as well as other people.’ No, damn you, thought I, I don’t suppose you do, and I hope Miss Romney will show a woman’s usual conscience about money, and charge you double what I charge instead of half, as you evidently expect. My old enemy, Miss Jaques,” went on the doctor, with the comfortable air of one sure of a sympathetic listener, “she was the frankest about it. ‘I am going to throw you over, doctor,’ she calmly announced, the last time I called upon her—let me see, it must be eighteen months ago. ‘Are you indeed, ma’am?’ said I. ‘It is what I must have expected. Your consideration in giving me notice of your intention is a greater grace than I deserve. Miss Romney, I presume?’ ‘Dr. Romney, yes. I think, doctor, I have got about all the amusement I can out of you, and I want a change.’ ‘Pray change then,’ said I. ‘Far

be it from me to interfere with your amusement—though it seems to me a lady doctor is not exactly the person one would go to in search of amusement.’ ‘I want to see how she does it,’ said Miss Jacques. ‘Watching her ape you god-like creatures will amuse me.’ I fled then,” added the doctor; “when she begins on men I always fly. But it strikes me,” he said, seriously, “that she was honestly glad to get a person of her own sex to attend her. I believe she has kept back something from me. I was sorry to lose her, for we never could agree; but her tongue is too caustic by half for a woman.”

“I don’t know what women are coming to,” Fane said, in a tone of strong disgust. “They are recklessly throwing aside everything that most charms and attracts men.”

“So much the better—there will be fewer marriages,” said the confirmed old bachelor. “They may use the powers of making themselves disagreeable given them by bountiful nature to their utmost limits; all I object to is their poaching on our preserves.”

“How long has Miss Romney been in the town?”

“Nearly two years.”

“What is she like?”

"Never seen her. They say she is good-looking."

Fane replied to this by an inarticulate grunt, in no way softened by hearing it.

"Well," said Dr. Fullagher, after a pause, "will you come and avenge me? or is Wanningster too circumscribed a field for you?"

"Not a bit of it," said Fane, pulling himself out of his chair, and lazily stretching himself as he towered up in superb height. "I rather like the town, and I have always regarded you as a lucky fellow; but a man can't decide in a moment where to pitch his tent. I should like to avenge you, and I believe I could do it. The fight would be amusing even if I didn't care to stay."

"Ah!" sighed Dr. Fullagher, "it's fine to be young and strong. I wish I could buy back my youth and strength; I would gladly be poor again and never taste port, if I could go back thirty years. I shouldn't need any one to fight my battles then. I, who hate women and despise them—I, to be beaten in my old age by one as surely as ever that unfortunate devil, Samson, was beaten!" His florid face flushed deeper, and his voice shook with anger.

"It won't be for long. They will soon tire of their expensive caprice. Wait until she loses one

or two of their children, or their wives—they will come back quicker than they went then,” said Fane.

“Will they? I wish they would. I would send them to the devil! I should like them to have no one to go to—to be obliged to fall back on that imbecile Garthorpe, and his everlasting ‘warm drinks,’ for a while, until a new man came to deliver them. Stay away, Fane. They don’t deserve such a good man. And by ——! I’ll throw up the appointments, and kick the next man who comes for advice into the middle of next week if his wife employs that woman. I’ll submit to their confounded impudence no longer. I’ll retire in good earnest.”

“Don’t excite yourself, doctor,” said Fane. “A new man would find it easy to drive her out of the town. I’ll go and give a look at the place, and see what I think of it. I should like a stroll.”

He went out alone, for Dr. Fullagher preferred a nap in his arm-chair.

The doctor’s house was in a quiet and old quarter of the town. Monk Lane, with its large square red-brick houses, had once been fashionable, but fashion had deserted it for the new streets of modern bay-windowed houses. Fane had paid his friend several flying visits, and

knew the town tolerably well—that is to say, the old part of it. He took his way towards the race-course. The quiet, almost empty business streets left behind, and London Road entered upon, he found himself no longer treading familiar regions. Here, where London Road had begun,—a veritable country road, with fields on either side,—began long, compact rows of tall grey houses, and out of the road branched new streets and other terraces. Fane sauntered on, drinking in the mild air, and meditating in a desultory fashion upon his friend's proposal. He had led a roving, adventurous life; the thought of being tied to one place, and that place a moderate-sized midland town, was not alluring. Still, he must start in practice somewhere; he acknowledged the necessity, exasperating as it was. He was thirty-five—it was time he made use of his profession: and he had lately lost money. And why not Wanningster? Wanningster would give him a living as well as any other place. He glanced at the long rows of houses, where the lights of numerous homes shone through the blinds; there was scope, certainly, but he felt no great coveting of the money to be made out of these many dwellings.

He walked some distance along London Road. The terraces stopped, and semi-detached villas

with large gardens began. These again were succeeded by single houses, standing in still larger gardens. He passed the race-course on his right, and turned back at the toll-bar. Going homewards, he left the main road, and chose one of the cross-streets, rightly supposing it would take him a shorter way to Monk Lane. Nearly at the end of the street a brass plate on the gate of one of the uniform "single" houses caught his eye, and glancing at it in passing, he read the name, "Edith Romney, M.D."

Fane pulled up short with an almost audible laugh of derision. He looked with keen interest at the house. The two windows of the second story were lit up; there were the clustered shadows of leaves upon the blinds, as though several plants stood behind them, and through the inch or two's open space of one window floated sweet girlish singing.

"A younger sister, maybe," thought Fane. "Wonder if she is being trained as assistant. Oh, the deuce, how nauseous it is! No wonder Fullagher raves."





CHAPTER II.

NO. 20, PRINCESS ROAD.

“When sunshine glistens round,
And friends as young as we are sit beside us.”
LANDOR.

THE drawing-room of No. 20, Princess Road, at the lighted windows of which Austin Fane had gazed that soft May evening, wanted none of the trifles and nicknacks which are supposed to denote feminine taste and occupancy. The room was the largest in the house, taking in the space over the entrance as well as that over the dining-room, and was furnished prettily and simply in the ordinary manner of drawing-rooms. The colours were quiet and subdued, the ornaments good and well chosen.

It was the middle of June now. The two windows were filled with plants, and every available vase with roses, which sweetened the air deliciously. Near the bay-window sat a young girl. The white curtain behind made a clear and luminous background for the slight figure leaning a little forward, and the pretty fair head

and delicately-tinted face bent over some elaborate fancy-work. Her dress was a dainty ruffled affair of pale blue muslin. Unbraceleted wrists showed their fair and tender curves below the frilled sleeve, and two white half-blown roses fastened the frill about her neck. At her elbow stood a gipsy-table, with its equipage of afternoon tea.

A young man, rather tall, slender, and handsome, lounged on an ottoman in the middle of the room, tea-cup in hand, allowing a pair of languid, admiring eyes to rest upon her.

Winifred was not unconscious of their glance; it partly accounted for her bent head and industry, for the door had just closed upon her aunt. She and Mr. Ardley were alone, and for the first moment she felt almost shy.

Oscar crossed over to her and put down his cup.

"Let me give you some more tea," said Winifred, raising her fair flushed face.

"No, thank you," he said, standing beside her. "How busy you are!"

"Yes; but it won't look right," said she, in childish phrase. She leaned back and surveyed her flowers with almost pouting dissatisfaction. "What shade would you put here, Mr. Ardley?"

He bent down to look at her work, and then

at the bundle of faded greens she held up for his inspection, and considered the question with judicial gravity.

"This, I think," he said at length, laying a finger on one.

Winifred drew out a piece at once.

"What a comfort it is to have a decision taken off one's mind sometimes!"

"Whether the rash person who ventures his opinion is competent to give a decision or not!"

"Oh, sometimes I get into such a state of doubt that I would take a child's opinion just to end it."

"I had no idea fancy-work gave so much trouble."

"Ah!" murmured Winifred, in a tone of much feeling.

Oscar sauntered towards a china plate suspended against the wall.

"Have you added china-painting to your other accomplishments?" he inquired.

"Yes; and I like it so much."

"This is your first, I presume?"

"What are you looking at?" Winifred turned her head. "That? oh, no; I did not paint that. Miss Milward gave it to me on my birthday."

"I thought you were good friends?" observed Oscar.

"So we are. Enemies don't give each other birthday presents."

"Well, it depends upon the present. Did Miss Milward stipulate that it was to be hung in a conspicuous place?"

"Of course it was understood," said Winifred, laughing. "I wish now that I had let you think it was my own painting. What would you have said?"

"I should have acted the candid friend," he rejoined. "Gently, but firmly, I should have intimated that even china-painting requires a little practice; that it is not advisable as a rule to exhibit one's first attempt."

"You would? I only wish you had been put to the proof."

"What I admire most in this work of art is the drawing of the girl's nose and forehead. Continue this severe vertical line of brow and curve it as subtly as you please—that is to say, as suddenly as you can—it is impossible to join it on to the line of head. You would be obliged to start off sharply at right angles, and then," tracing an imaginary line with the tip of his finger, "even then you would have to make a descent to reach the crown. Only a great, a

very rare genius, could imagine a brow and nose forming a sharp corner with the top of the head and see beauty in it. Happily the frizz of hair—is this hair, Miss Noel?—helps to deceive the eye.”

“Poor Miss Milward!”

“I think I pity her friends on their birthdays most.”

“Of course the drawing is bad and the colouring very crude and faulty,” said Winifred, who had left her seat to examine the plate too; “but,” hesitatingly, “you must admit there is a certain prettiness—”

“Prettiness! ‘We want the Best in art now, or no art.’ But then,” added Oscar, turning on his heel, “that is not art.”

“Oh dear, oh dear,” sighed Winifred. “It is hard that we, poor feeble dabblers, should be deprived of the pleasure of at least trying to paint pretty things.”

“I don’t include *you*—of course not,” he said, quickly. “You have talent; you draw correctly, beautifully, not simpering absurdities such as that up there. It is not a mere dawdling amusement with you—it is genuine intellectual recreation.”

“You are very kind and flattering,” said Winifred.

“I am only speaking sober truth.”

“Well,” she said, going to a table and beginning to turn over some papers, “I never had ambition. I have never dreamed fond dreams of being an artist—a real artist. But drawing and painting are pleasant and delightful to me, and as we can’t all attempt striving after the ‘Best,’ why should I not amuse myself and waste paint and paper if I like?” with a little touch of defiance.

“You don’t waste them,” smiling.

“Nor my time?”

“No, decidedly not. You say painting is delightful to you—you cannot do better than be happy.”

“Oh!” she exclaimed, in slow, wide-eyed consideration of this sentiment. Then she shook her head meditatively, and took up the sheet of paper she had chosen, and said dubiously, “That sounds rather a dangerous theory.”

“I think it is the ‘Best’ for you,” said Oscar, smiling again and checking a half sigh.

There was a grave indifference, an almost melancholy languor in his manner which impressed people with the idea that he was older than he really was. The languor and gravity were not affected—they were merely the reaction after ardent feelings. He had gone

through the ordeal of a grand passion a few months ago, and what young man could be mortal who did not give himself world-worn airs on the strength of such an experience? The first-fruit of hardly-won experience is generally sadness. He had passed the despairing stage—the chastened sadness and weariness which had succeeded were as becoming as they could be. When he spoke of happiness he spoke of something in which he had lost all personal share and interest; the word to him could only be a meaningless symbol. Still every one had not tasted the despair of its eternal loss, and there was almost a pitying gentleness in his eyes and voice as he added, “Surely you believe in happiness?”

The delicate musing face changed in a moment.

“Oh, yes,” said Winifred, with a radiant smile, “indeed I do.” Then for some reason she flushed and her shining eyes fell. “Mr. Ardley,” she said, quickly, “I have been attempting a design for the top of a table—ivy and oak leaves, as you perceive. I wish you would tell me what you think of it.”

He sat down at the table and was soon making some trifling alterations. Winifred knelt on a low chair and rested her arms upon the back.

“I think the aim of happiness is contemptible

after all," she said. "Doing things one likes—music, painting, and studying, as I do, for instance. But what can girls do? Only those little things come in our way. Our work is only play, really."

"Don't you think you are extremely fortunate in having that part assigned you? You don't yearn after rough, hard, disagreeable work, do you?"

"I don't like anything disagreeable," said Winifred, frankly. "But still one would like to think one did something *useful*," almost pathetically, "if it were only for the sake of the novelty," she added, laughing.

"Don't," murmured Oscar.

"Don't what?"

"Don't want to be useful—it is the besetting sin of the day."

"Then how can I expect to escape it?"

"Well, you are useful. The more civilized the country (forgive the truism) the more numerous its industries. We don't need merely the necessities of life, we need luxuries, elegancies, refinements—in short, ornament."

"I come in there! I suppose I must be content."

"I suppose," said Oscar, smilingly as he drew, "the atmosphere of this house must induce ideas

about women's mission and work and that sort of thing."

"Indeed, you are quite mistaken! Perhaps there is less of what you comprehensively term 'that sort of thing' in this house than in any in Wanningster."

"Really?"

"Because my aunt is a doctor you credit her with odious, strong-minded views."

"Forgive my stupidity. Surely you will admit there is some excuse for it in the fact you mention?"

"Perhaps so," said Winifred, with some discontent. "Yes, I suppose people will naturally think so; but it *isn't*," very emphatically. "Oh dear, there goes the bell again! Poor Aunt Edith will be kept longer. I only hope she has not to go out—it would be too dreadful if she was called out and couldn't go to the Chutterworths' this evening!"

"Dreadful indeed! I quite look forward to seeing you there. Let us hope for better things."

"Ah, you don't know what it is to live with a doctor. When we are engaged anywhere I never feel safe until we have fairly started, and not always then. To-night, for instance, suppose a message should come just when we are dressed!"

“Pray don’t let us suppose it. There is no good in needlessly harrowing our own feelings.”

“It has happened more than once,” said Winifred. “I have been quite ready—down to my gloves, and full of blissful anticipations, and poor Aunt Edith has hurried in, ‘Oh, Winnie dear, I am so sorry—I am called out.’ Once we were going to a concert—a concert with the most delightful programme—a concert I had looked forward to with longings inexpressible, and, Mr. Ardley, a message from Mrs. Ardley stopped us on the doorstep—I thought the step added bitterness to the tragedy.”

“I am full of contrition,” he exclaimed.

“For what you had nothing to do with!” laughing

“I begin to see that the life of a doctor has its own peculiar trials. Would it not be safer to have a second chaperon provided for these emergencies? It is hard upon you to be deprived of your gaiety so ruthlessly.”

“I do go with some one out of the house occasionally. But it is not always possible to secure a substitute for Aunt Edith in time—sick people are not a foreseeing class.”

Oscar put down his pencil and gave the drawing a last critical glance. “There, Miss Noel.

Do you approve of my alterations, or have I spoilt it?"

Winifred came to look, and expressed warm thanks and admiration.

Just then Miss Romney returned.

Young Ardley watched her as she walked across the room. He had much of the artistic faculty of admiring beauty for beauty's sake. He admired Edith Romney as he admired a fine poem or picture—her profession, and reputation of strong-mindedness in consequence, quite prevented any personal warmth in his admiration. It was a pleasure to him to watch the beautiful face and tall straight figure as Edith walked forward; but for a companion he infinitely preferred Winifred, whose girlish prettiness shrank into comparative insignificance beside the perfected bloom of the woman of twenty-eight, and who, moreover, met him on the generally recognised footing of men and women—a footing of rightly placed inequality, requiring her to look upwards. Neither mentally nor physically was this to be expected from Edith. She was almost as tall as Oscar. Her physique was noble. She had been endowed with beauty and health to a royal extent. The curved outline of her face was lovely, and so were the dark serious eyes. The brow below the softening frame of dark

brown hair was low, broad, and thoughtful, the eyebrows very finely and exquisitely traced. Her mouth was grave and gentle ; her skin, clear and pale, with a slight deepening of rose on either cheek.

She struck Oscar with something like surprise each time he saw her. He found it difficult to reconcile her appearance, as graceful and gracious as a woman's could be, with the association—when out of her presence—of her name with the medical profession and her busy duties as practitioner. That association was attended by others—those of grimness, hardness, and what Winifred had termed “odious strong-mindedness.”

“Oh, here you are, Aunt Edith,” exclaimed Winifred, “I was afraid that second ring was a tiresome patient who might keep you a long time.”

“No, it was only a message,” said Edith, going to the tea-table. “Is there any tea, Winnie? I have to go out.”

“There!” cried Winifred, tragically, turning to Oscar. “Just what my boding fears foretold!”

Edith laughed. “You need not be so dismal, dear; I am only going to the rectory. I shall be back in time to dress for dinner.”

“I feel quite as much relieved on my own account,” said Oscar, as Winnie drew an exaggerated sigh of relief.

Edith, who had poured herself out a cup of tea, and was stirring it, glanced at him as he said this with quiet interest, almost curiosity, and then at the pretty girl he was smilingly regarding.

"I'm afraid, Auntie dear, the tea is cold," said Winifred, taking up the teapot and touching it with the tips of her fingers. Finding she could lay the palm of her hand quite comfortably upon its blue and white side, she looked disturbed. "Oh, it will be quite cold! Shall I ring for fresh?"

"Oh, no; I cannot wait. And I don't mind," said Edith absently.

Oscar took his leave, and departed.

Winifred began putting away the drawings, singing softly as she did so. When the drawings were in their case, she glanced at her aunt in some surprise. Edith had drunk her cold tea, put down the cup, and was standing with her hands behind her thoughtfully gazing out at the opposite row of houses. On receiving a message she generally went at once.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Winifred.

"I was trying to remember when Mr. Ardley was here last."

"Oh! some days ago—it was on Monday."

"It is rather soon to come again," observed Edith, still thoughtfully gazing out.

"He called to bring me this book—he promised to lend it to me on Monday." Winifred took up the book and fluttered the leaves.

"And it's a great pity," added Edith, turning round.

"A pity?" Winifred started. "What do you mean?"

"It may make unpleasantness with his people if he continues to call often. Mrs. Ardley is sure to object."

"Mrs. Ardley! what right has she to interfere with her step-son?"

Edith was on her way to the door; but she stopped in some surprise on hearing the scornful tone.

"None, really, of course; but every right given by imagination, you may depend upon it. You know what a weak, foolish woman she is. One dreads having to deal with unreasonable people—and naturally I think about the danger of losing a good patient."

"Oh, there is no danger!" said Winifred, confidently. "She won't go back to Dr. Fullagher. And Mr. Ardley will not take her into his confidence about his calls."

"No, I think not;" and Edith laughed. "I

must go. We must not be late at The Elms this evening."

Her busy life, the being called out at all hours and in every degree of urgency, had developed the habit of quick preparation for walking or driving. She was ready in three minutes, had run downstairs and let herself out, and was walking swiftly down the road the next.





CHAPTER III.

A MORNING DREAM.

“I had fire enough in my brain,
And builded, with roofs of gold,
My beautiful castles in Spain!” — *Lowell*.

WINIFRED was quite correct in her indignant denial of her aunt's possession of “odious strong-minded views.” Edith had not adopted the profession through any unbecoming desire to distinguish herself; the wish to be a doctor had grown up with her from childhood.

No childish precocity, however, had suggested the possibility of an unusual career. Indeed, her father, who was proud of her beauty and her perfect physique, and in his heart of hearts loved her best of his three children, had *almost* begun to entertain grave fears that his darling was not brilliantly clever. Instead of being devoted to her lessons she showed a disappointing love for story-books, reading all that came in her way. She was bright, romantic, and imaginative, yet all the stories she read never tempted her to put pen to paper in crude

attempts at imitation. She gave her beloved father no immature efforts either in prose or verse to hoard in his desk. Occasionally, he picked up scraps of paper adorned with wild and remarkable illustrations of the latest story his little daughter had been poring over, extraordinary men and women and animals, which caused him to laugh softly, and murmur with gratification, "The child has a turn for drawing, any way." Some months after his death, when Edith, a full-grown, beautiful woman, took courage to go through his papers, she found a little heap of these weird gleanings, each with an explanatory title added in her father's hand. The absurdity or grotesque dignity of the description brought the smile trembling through showers of tears. It was her turn to cherish the "scenes."

Though she liked stories, history was distasteful to her, and more distasteful still was arithmetic. Geography was her favourite lesson; she would pore over the atlas, tracing long and most delightful routes. In these early days she was essentially a dreamer. Her castles in the air were of the most varied structure, for her imagination revelled in almost every phase of grandeur or romance. The slightest thing was enough to send it roaming. The description of

a royal wedding in the newspapers made her fancy herself a princess and a bride, and exhausted all her knowledge of what was gorgeous in millinery and jewelry from her study of the drapers' and jewellers' windows. Hearing a missionary discourse of his adventures and successes sent her active imagination to the wildest shores of heathendom. She saw herself earnest, devoted, never tiring, never daunted, as she slaved to win souls, and to teach and civilise savages, obtaining respect, adoration, and unbounded influence. Or again, she would be a home missionary, and do endless good in the vilest haunts of London—be an angel of goodness and help to poor struggling men and women.

Then her imagination would take a flight into the "Arabian Nights'" realm. She was to find in some mysterious way the key of a garden similar to the one in which Aladdin wandered, to make her lonely midnight expedition to it, and see its splendour and riches. Then she would return to the common earth, and amaze and delight her friends by the beautiful things she would give them. She loved this dream of boundless wealth and all the power it would give her—it was perhaps her favourite of all. Her father should work no more, and have everything he wanted. They would live in a

palace, they would travel, go everywhere, see everything, and be happy every hour. She fled to this dream when her warm little heart was hurt or saddened by some small vexation or childish trouble. When this golden key was hers, all would be well, and there would be nothing disagreeable to be heard or endured. Papa would never be worried by stupid patients; mamma would never be ill, or low-spirited; Maude never discontented; Hugh would be happy and great; Sarah, the cook, who had lived in the family since Edith was a baby, would never be cross; and arithmetic would be a thing of the past. The child dreamed of perfect happiness in the untidy garden, where few flowers found leave to grow, as she sat swaying idly to and fro in the old swing, gazing up into the soft sky, which was the only lovely thing to be seen, except the rounded beautiful childish creature herself.

Sometimes charitable schemes beset her. After reading a story of poor life, she was struck by the idea of taking care of poor boys and girls. She fixed upon a large deserted manor-house two miles out of the town as a fitting establishment for her institution. When she was grown up and rich—for rich she must be of course to do any good in the world, though how her riches were

to be gained was a matter of detail it was not always necessary to go into—she would buy this great place, repair where necessary, and furnish it for its great purpose. The boys and girls should be taught, and made useful and happy; they were not to be without children's pleasures. As each left her to begin the world, she would give him or her a present, and some last useful, sensible advice; and the men and women would look back to the early years spent under her roof with gratitude, and bless her for their benefactress to the end of their days. This institution was carefully planned and thought out. The routines of a day in summer and of a day in winter were conscientiously elaborated, and the scheme took an honourable place among the others. She liked to imagine herself the gracious head of such an establishment, serene and saintly, kind and gentle, admired and adored by everyone without exception under her rule. She suggested the advisability of this undertaking to Sarah, modestly presenting the idea as one which bore no reference to herself, and she was a little disheartened by that worthy woman's non-enthusiasm. Sarah was not imaginative, or, at least, her imagination was not equal to surmounting the practical difficulties in the carrying out of such an idea.

"Ay," she said, an ejaculation which seemed to include every shade of scepticism and cynical indifference. "Don't you think it would be a splendid thing for poor children?" said Edith.

"What! makin' of 'em paupers?"

"Paupers?" For once Sarah had beaten Edith in the use of a mysterious word.

"What else would it make 'em?" demanded Sarah, kneading her bread with ferocious energy. "As far as I can make out, Miss Edith, it's only a new sort of work'us you're talkin' on."

"Oh, no! not a workhouse!" Edith had driven to the workhouse with her father and had been dismally impressed by that gloomy place. "Not a workhouse, Sarah! Not anything like one! A nice large house in the country with fields and gardens, and good teachers, and a—a kind lady to take care of the children and make them happy." The child regarded the stolid-faced representative of the poor before her wistfully—this lovely plan must tempt her.

Sarah grunted and shook her head. "Ay," she said again. "It 'ud need a mint of money, and I wonder what lady 'ud be found willin' to give her money and her time to it. Rich folks knows the value of money too well to be in a hurry to spend it over poor folks. Rich folks is all selfish."

“ Oh, Sarah ! ” gasped Edith. This sweeping assertion was a terrible blow. “ Don’t you think,” almost timidly, “ there are *some* good people ? ”

Sarah laughed grimly. “ I b’lieve there’s some good in some people,” said she, “ but I don’t b’lieve there’s h’angels—except only in ’eaven.”

“ Can’t people be *almost* as good as angels before they are dead ? ” asked Edith.

“ Dyin’ may make ’em so, but livin’ don’t,” said Sarah, snorting oracularly.

It must be confessed that Edith’s childish day-dreams tended chiefly to self-glorification. Her friends were to be enriched and made happy with her, but hers was to be the hand to do it all, in her hands was all the power to remain. This was simply the inevitable outcome of her healthy, vigorous nature. The passive attitude had no charms for her—she wanted to give, not to receive ; she wanted to do, to help, to make happy, to benefit. She was generous, warm-hearted, and beneficent ; she had the instinctive shrinking of all glad creatures from gloom, and the divine yearning of youth to put wrong right.

She was twelve when these various dreams and fancies merged into one ambition. One gloomy November afternoon she accompanied her father on his country rounds. To go with him was her favourite treat, and to have her with him was

certainly the doctor's. On warm summer days Edith would get out of the carriage, and spend the time of waiting in roaming about gathering flowers, or in lying on the grass dreaming over some happy fancy. In winter she remained in the carriage, generally with a story-book. On this occasion they went some six miles into the country; the doctor was detained for an unusually long visit, and it was quite dusk as they drove homewards. A long drive in the twilight or the dark was Edith's delight, and the child sat in sleepy enjoyment, leaning against her father's shoulder, feeling the swift movement, watching through half-closed eyes the dark trees and irregular hedges which seemed to move to meet them. The doctor whistled softly a favourite old air, going through it again and again, in a low monotonous sweetness in harmony with the rapid motion and darkening air. The stopping of the horses was a sudden break. Edith sat up, startled. Dr. Romney put his head out, and was at once addressed by the man who had stopped them. Sleepy as she was, the child noticed the haggard anxiety and eagerness of the rough face. A cottage stood a few yards from the road, a low, thatched, one-storied building, with the door wide open, and two lighted small square windows.

The doctor was already opening the carriage door.

"There has been an accident—keep warm, Edie, darling," he said, and in another moment his thin tall figure was walking quickly up the crooked stony path. He stooped under the low doorway and entered without ceremony.

All feeling of sleepiness had left his young daughter. She sat erect and gazed at the cottage. The unexpected stopping, the appeal of the poor man, and the word "accident," had thrilled her with excitement. The dark outline of the ill-built cottage, the agitation and commotion within, revealed by the quickly moving shadows which passed and re-passed the lighted windows and across the open doorway, the twilight and stillness around—a stillness rather enhanced than disturbed by the whispering voices of the two men, her father's coachman and the labourer—all these deeply impressed on the child's mind the sense of mysterious trouble and danger lying within those wretched walls. She trembled, and yet could not do otherwise than drink in the weird, melancholy influences.

When her father returned, a woman followed him down the path, and they stood talking a minute at the gate. The doctor was giving his last directions. The woman's figure was bowed,

and her face wore an utterly crushed expression. Edith's eyes, accustomed to the twilight, watched her fascinated, and her heart beat fast with pity. Her father's business-like voice took a gentle compassionate tone. "Whatever you do you must not lose heart, Mary," he said.

"How can I help it, sir?" she said simply, putting up the corner of her apron to her eyes.

"You must help it. You know all depends on you. I'll call first thing to-morrow," said the doctor, cheerily, "and send Bob for those things. Good evening."

He got into the carriage. They drove on, and the scene of suffering and anxiety was left behind.

Edith examined her father curiously; it was a surprise to find that he looked pretty much as usual—grave, certainly, but not terribly shocked.

"How unhappy that poor woman looked, papa," she said. "Is the accident a bad one?"

"Two children ill of fever, one lying dead from it, and the eldest son brought home insensible with a cut head. A 'battalion,' truly," muttered the doctor.

"Oh!" gasped Edith.

"Ah, my child," sighed her father. "there are always plenty of such troubles to be found."

"But can't doctors do a great deal of good?"

"Yes, dear; a great deal. It is a grand profession."

"Oh, papa," cried the child with breathless earnestness, "let *me* be a doctor!"

Her father lifted her on his knee, and folded his arms closely about her, as if he would enfold and protect her from all contact with the outside world.

"My darling! I should be very sorry," he said, tenderly kissing her.

"Oh, papa, I should like to be like you—able to help poor people and make them glad when I came! Ladies can be doctors, can't they?"

"I should be very sorry if I thought my little girl would be left to work for her own living. So sorry, Edie, darling."

"But if I worked just to do good? I could doctor people even if you kept me at home," she pleaded.

"That would be better than being dependent on your work for bread—but I hope the day won't come. I would rather do all the hard work for my pet. You are upset, dear. I wish you had not been with me this afternoon."

Edith nestled against him lovingly.

"I am glad I went," she said; "I am quite sure now what I shall like doing best. Making

people well must be far the best way of doing good."

"Do you wish to do people good?"

"I wanted to make them happy," she said, wistfully. "When did you begin to get ready to be a doctor, papa?"

"Well, dear, I was not quite as young as you are. You will have plenty of time to change your mind before you need to begin."

"I sha'n't change it," she said, decidedly.

"There are other things to learn before you can be a medical student—those things which give you so much trouble now, Edie. Arithmetic, for instance."

Edith sighed.

"Will that be useful?"

"Very useful," said her father, with gravity.

"Then I will learn it," she said, in a tone of high resolve.

Dr. Romney felt with some compunction that he was taking a slightly mean advantage of her enthusiasm. Of course the wish would fade, as, perhaps, twenty other wishes would arise and fade in her ardent mind. She might please herself by dreaming over the distant future. Her father had no intention of allowing his daughter to adopt his own profession; but he preferred leaving the fancy to die its natural

death to hurting his darling by forbidding its fulfilment. He had no idea of deluding her by false hopes ; such a notion would have struck him as being exceedingly comical ; he simply attached about the same degree of importance to her request as the nurse attaches to the ambitious infant's cry for the moon. He was so anxious that she should show herself brilliant in the paths of learning, and do away any reproach of dunce-ship, that he seized the opportunity to put in a word for the despised arithmetic, softening his remorse by assuring himself that the end justified the means.

Edith kept her promise. She bravely set to work, and was almost directly rewarded by a new and delightful experience—the student's pleasure in overcoming difficulties. She was too practical for that alone to content her, but interest clothed everything when she had a purpose in view ; when she felt, as she herself said, that her lessons were of use. Arithmetic was no longer a dry, dull science to be learnt, and there an end—it was a passage to further knowledge, and not merely one of the tasks considered necessary by unenlightened custom for the perplexity and torment of children.

“ My sums are getting quite easy to me now,

papa," said she to her never-failing sympathiser ;
"and I really like doing them."

Her father expressed a sincere pleasure at hearing this.

"Is it because it will help me to learn the other things?"

"What other things?" asked he, with reprehensible forgetfulness.

"Your things—doctoring things."

"Ah, no doubt," replied her father, surprised at the long life of that last wish.

Had he only known it, the wish grew stronger every day. After that November afternoon Edith regarded her father with different eyes. Always fondly loving him, and depending upon his sympathy for everything, she worshipped him now as a hero. Did he not carry with him, wherever he went, health and healing, help and comfort, to the poor and unhappy, the sick and the dying? She could not forget the relieved appeal of that poor labourer, the air of anxiety and confusion about the lighted, shadow-crossed cottage windows, the utter dependence of those poor people upon her father. Her thoughts followed him through his day's work. She would watch his going—very often jump after him into the carriage to snatch a last kiss before he shut the door—and would picture to herself

the pleasure and relief his arrival would cause where the illness was serious, his entrance into the sick-room and effective ministration—in short, following in fancy the progress of an unfaltering, all-knowing, and all-powerful conqueror of disease. In wrestling with her sums, a wonder would dart through her mind as to whether her father had any *very* sick people on his list that morning, and, if so, whether they were better or worse when he paid his call.

Not many weeks after that momentous November afternoon her mother was seized with a sudden fit of illness. Edith never forgot her bewilderment and terror, her own and the servants' blank helplessness and ignorance of what ought to be done, and the exquisite relief brought by her father's return—the help and comfort of his presence and knowledge. That experience added tenfold strength and ardour to her wish to follow in her father's steps.

There was no further difficulty about her powers of study. She learned everything with reference to the requirements of her chosen career. Dr. Romney would not hear of a boarding-school for her. She was sent to the best school in the town, where the teaching was fortunately excellent. There she acquitted herself so brilliantly, showing such clearness of

intellect, and power of steady work and application, that her father's heart was lifted up in pride. He delighted in giving food to that eager, growing mind; he never tired of answering the questions she poured upon him, and it must be confessed Edith took full advantage of his patience. One day he gave her "A Bit of Bread." Edith read it as she had read no book before, not even her favourite stories; it had for her all the magic charm of the first elements of a favourite science or art, every sentence was a further opening into all the exquisite fields of a wished-for knowledge. She tasted, pure and undefiled, the pleasure of learning.

After telling her father how greatly she had enjoyed the little book, she added, musingly, "It makes me see what *quantities* there are to be learned—oh it is splendid! splendid!"

Her father then proposed that she should learn physiology and Latin—not with any reference to her adopting his profession when she was old enough, simply because he could not resist the temptation of ministering to that craving for knowledge. The proposal was received with delight by Edith.

Her brother Hugh, who had not failed in the fraternal duty of making contemptuous allusions to his sister's stupidity in those days when

arithmetic was a drudgery to her, uttered strong objections against these studies. A girl did not need these subjects; they were unfeminine.

"Don't you think you can safely trust me to teach her nothing that will do her any harm?" asked Dr. Romney, drily. He was not in the best of humours with his son just then, for Hugh was disappointing him. The doctor had looked forward to his son's succeeding to his practice; unfortunately, however, Hugh imbibed extreme views at Oxford, and came home fired with the wish to enter the Church. It was a disappointment to Dr. Romney; but he said no word of his own regrets, and somewhat contemptuously allowed his son to choose his own calling — contemptuously, because he doubted the reality of his son's convictions, setting down a greater part of his enthusiasm to affectation. He had little respect for Hugh's opinion on any subject, and was not disposed to be at all affected by the young man's disapproval of anything he chose to teach Edith, even remaining unalarmed by the bugbear of "blue-stockings," which the defeated brother mentioned with impotent disgust.

The doctor went on teaching, and soon added chemistry and botany to the first two subjects. Once fairly afloat, as she considered it, in the

studies preparatory for medicine, Edith had no time to talk of the future. She felt that she was preparing for it, that her training had really begun—her father himself was laying the ground-work. It was an understood thing. The ordinary occupations and trivial ambitions of ordinary girls were unknown to her. The constant thought of the noble calling before her, the daily task of work in preparation for it, elevated and strengthened a mind which would never have felt any attraction in the vanities and follies of the average girl.

From a very early day her father had noted gratefully and rejoicingly the dissimilarity between Edith and her sister. Poor pretty Maude, who loved admiration and gaiety, and who, unhappily, fell in love with the eurate, Frank Noel, at the age of eighteen, and insisted upon having her own way, breaking down her parents' opposition with tears and fastings. They gave in against their will, and the two wilful young creatures were married. A year after Maude died, and the Romneys took her infant into their own keeping. Little Winifred grew up in her mother's early home, and found the tenderest care and love in her young aunt. It was Edith, only ten years older than herself, who took almost a mother's place towards her;

Edith, to whom she ran when hurt, sure of caresses and tender soothing — Aunt Edith, whose daily return from school she watched for and hailed with glee, pattering across the hall and throwing herself with laughs of delight into the young arms, readier and more loving than her own.

The doctor sighed as he contrasted the dead elder sister with the younger one, and congratulated himself on the difference.

“Edie will be in no hurry for any man,” he said, in his fond pride. He would keep her to himself for perhaps his whole life.

He soon learned, however, that would-be lovers were not the only danger to fear. Edith had said nothing for some time about adopting the medical profession, and her father had forgotten her childish wish. It was, therefore, a shock when she asked seriously to be sent to college.

As for Edith, she was surprised at the reception of her request. At first her mother and brother laughed it to scorn; then, when they found she was too deeply in earnest to be laughed out of the idea, Mrs. Romney's dismay was great, while Hugh's disgust vented itself in reproaches both voluble and bitter. Edith heard for the first time of the inferiority of her position

but it cannot be said she took the fact to heart. Not only was it too repugnant, but to the cherished, idolised daughter, it seemed monstrous and untrue. All Hugh's eloquence failed to make her understand that the privilege of choosing a career did not belong equally to them both.

Edith bore all easily, strong in the strength of her father's expected approval and consent. The fact was, in his disturbed state of mind, the doctor had hastily pooh-poohed Edith's idea to his wife. He had then taken advantage of a busy time to keep out as much as possible, and had for the first time rather avoided his dearly-loved child. This could only go on for a day or two, and it was during this interval that the opposition, composed of Mrs. Romney, Hugh, and Frank Noel, exerted themselves so strenuously. One evening, at the end of these few days of suspense, the doctor happened to enter the drawing-room in the middle of an earnest discussion on the subject. Hugh was in his finest flow, and Mrs. Romney was eagerly supporting him; Edith listened, a varying expression of distress, perplexity, and amusement passing over her beautiful face. Her father would gladly have retreated, but he had been seen. Edith flew to him and laid her hands upon his arm.

“Papa, come and tell me what it is all about!” she exclaimed, drawing him forward. “Do come and calm Hugh.”

Those coaxing, compelling hands appeared to Dr. Romney to be dragging him to execution. He suffered himself to be led to his chair, and then summoned his courage for the decisive moment. He could not look at Edith’s face.

“My dear,” said Mrs. Romney, in the eager tone of one to whom an unanswerable argument has just occurred, “your father thinks as we do. He will not allow——”

“Papa!” The cry brought up the doctor’s head. “Papa! I thought you knew, and understood—that you approved.” The girl’s face was troubled, her dark eyes were fixed on him with a startled look of pain and doubt and entreaty, her voice was imploring, and there was—yes, there was a perceptible accent of reproach. That conquered the doctor’s tender heart. He could not bear Edith—his good, sweet, darling child, who had never caused him a moment’s pain—he simply could not bear to hear her speak to him with the faintest accent of reproach. She seemed to be standing aloof from him—accusing him of having deceived her. Her father suffered a moment’s utter wretched-

ness—he would yield anything, anything!—only let her love be as full and trusting and childlike as it had always been.

He got up from his chair, holding out his arms in wistful entreaty. “My darling, you shall be what you like,” said he. And then as Edith, radiant, happy, and grateful, threw her arms round his neck, and he clasped her tightly to him, he felt for the moment almost consoled. He kissed her passionately, as if he had been in danger of losing her, and then abruptly released her.

“There, Hugh, you need say no more,” he said sharply. “You have had your turn—it’s only fair she should have hers.” With that the doctor hastened from the room. Edith went to Paris. No one knew how cruelly her father suffered in letting her follow her own way. Always shy and reserved, he kept this sorrow jealously to himself. He comforted his wife, saying—what, by-the-bye, he did not believe—that the first taste of training would probably shock and discourage Edith, and make her change her mind; and Mrs. Romney gave in easily to the inevitable, ill-health and a gentle yieldingness of character disposing her to languid acquiescence—if Edith’s father allowed her strange course, it must be right. But the

doctor had no such comfort. The parting wrung his heart; the days that followed were dark and sad; the brightness, the joy, the freshness of life, went away with the bright, beautiful, fond daughter. He would not sadden her by showing how much he grudged her independent career. He did not say a discouraging word. He had given his consent, and it seemed to her he gave it cheerfully. He helped her with her preparations, giving her the necessary books and instruments, and a little advice of a practical nature, and accompanied his gifts with jokes and tenderly ironical allusions to her future greatness, and after speeding her on her way with encouragement and cheerfulness, he shut himself up in his study and broke down in an agony of grief and desolation.

Two years after Edith experienced her first great trouble. Her father and mother died within a few days of each other. In the first prostration of her loss only grief seemed left to her. But her father, shortly before his death, had expressed a wish that she should continue her medical studies—glad, then, that she had obtained her desire, for he trusted in the sustaining power of work. And Edith obeyed. She took Winifred back to Paris with her, and sent the girl to school. When, in due course of time,

she gained her diploma, the joy which she had expected that great event to bring seemed lost in a certain grave in a beautiful English cemetery.





CHAPTER IV.

MRS. STANFORTH'S NEWS.

“ I have news to tell you.”—*Hamlet*.

THIS June afternoon she was walking down Wanningster London Road, a successful doctor, and a fairly important personage in this Midland town. She had gained her wish to lead a busy life of usefulness—the life she had idealised and thought so noble and desirable when watching her father was hers. She carried comfort and help with her; she was appealed to, and her knowledge was respected; her days were filled with real and needful work, and so far there had been no disappointment in this attained ambition. The work was given to her as amply as she had hoped for even in her wildest day-dreams; and it was as valuable and satisfactory, her powers were as equal to it, as she had expected. Success seemed natural. She took it undoubtingly, with none of that nervous fearfulness felt by those to whom it comes after long delay and many failures. No fear of losing it

disturbed her; she enjoyed it without alloy—as unquestioningly and completely as a little child enjoys the possession of some coveted toy.

She walked down the shady side of the broad road with the light step, the easy and erect carriage of health and freedom from care. Her dress of dark grey—for she still wore a sort of half-mourning for her parents—was made as simply as the fashion would allow, black gloves and a shady black hat completed her costume. London Road was very lively at that time of day. Business men were returning from their warehouses and offices, and carriages bearing ladies from calls or shopping met her going suburbwards. The young doctress received numerous salutations. Mr. Ardley, senior, sedate and middle-aged, raised his hat. The Milwards, father and son, in earnest discussion as usual, bestowed friendly greetings upon her, and the father's pleasant face beamed with its pleasantest smile of admiration as he lisped in passing, "We shall see you this evening, of course?"

"Yes," replied Edith, bowing and smiling.

A dog-cart with the great Mr. Chutterworth himself and his son approached, and Mr. Chutterworth, in high good-humour, bent down from his lofty seat as he was whisked past

to shout — “Don’t forget to-night — h’eight sharp!”

He is afraid we shall be late, thought Edith, amused. A few steps further on she went into a confectioner’s, and bought a liberal quantity of a sweetmeat, dear to the soul of a certain youthful pet of hers.

The Rectory was near St. Matthew’s, a large old church in the heart of the town. The church and churchyard were enclosed in a square, with houses built on three sides—the fourth branched out at right angles into a dull crooked street, with high walls overhung with ivy almost hiding the old-fashioned houses behind. The Rectory was on the east side of the square and took Edith some fifteen minutes’ walking.

The long, narrow drawing-room, with a window at each end—one looking over the churchyard, and the other into the large garden behind—was shaded by green venetians, and on a couch near the second window, which was open, lay Mrs. Stanforth. She was a refined, fragile, looking woman, with a tired and saddened air of ill-health. The Wanningsterians, especially those who composed the congregation of St. Matthew’s, which was the fashionable church, were very proud of their Rector’s wife. It was

known that she came of good family. There was some vagueness in their knowledge of her family, but one thing was certain—there was a baronet in it; how remotely or how nearly connected remained an unsettled point—a comparatively unimportant matter of detail—the mere connection with a baronet cast a glamour over everything about the Rector's wife. Even those who must cavil, and who censured Mrs. Stanforth for being a “fine lady” and quite insensible to the responsibilities of her position as a clergyman's wife, found extenuating circumstances for her remissness. “What could be expected from one brought up in aristocratic society and accustomed to nothing but gaiety? She must find it very different.”

That was exactly what Mrs. Stanforth had done. The bright, delicate young creature, brought up in luxury and in gay society, found the change to a quiet parsonage in a dull provincial town a rude and startling shock. The duties of her position, the calls and attention required by the uninteresting, exacting, coldly-critical, provincial families, affected her like a nightmare. She tried valiantly for the first year, and then gave it up in despair. She cared nothing for parish matters, she had neither strength nor inclination for the busy succession

of outside interests which absorb the time of many clergymen's wives; and she was so often ill. The utmost use of the baronet was needed at first to animate the charity of her neighbours; but by degrees they became contented with the little she gave them, solacing themselves by pitying the Rector for having married such a useless wife. Ladies in the congregation were not wanting to supply her deficiencies towards the parish, and everyone was proud of her, almost everyone, too, liked her.

Amongst other fastidious peculiarities Mrs. Stanforth was given to taking antipathies, and from the first she had felt one for Dr. Fullagher.

The old doctor, who could soften his brusqueness to the greatest gentleness when he liked, had, for some contradictory caprice, not chosen to do so with her. He had a special dislike to the fine-lady type of woman, and he had perversely shown himself at his worst during his attendance upon her; and the sensitive, nervous lady, detecting his dryness of manner and lack of sympathy, shrank from him as being what she shudderingly and conclusively said, "not a gentleman." The doctor was shrewd enough to divine this judgment on her part, and revenged himself in characteristic fashion by delicately aiding her belief in it.

The advent of a lady-doctor offered her no release from Dr. Fullagher's ministrations. She almost sympathised with his sneers about the new arrival, and when he sardonically supposed she would throw him over for Dr. Edith Romney, she could only shake her head in disgust at the idea. Soon after she saw Edith. It was in the great entrance to the church after morning service. A heavy shower of rain was falling, and the first thing that attracted Mrs. Stanforth's notice was a lady's voice—so different from the voices of her husband's parishioners—saying softly, just before her, "It is raining. Winnie. We must wait a little." A tall lady and a young girl drew aside to let others pass. Mrs. Stanforth examined them while she waited for the umbrella she had sent a lad for. Most of the people had gone, as she generally stayed till nearly the last, and soon the Rector came hurrying out. He saw the strangers and bowed, for he had been introduced to Edith. As they went home his wife asked who she was, and on hearing, declared her intention of calling upon her.

"Ah!" said Mr. Stanforth, surprised. "Haven't you enough to do in that way, my dear?"

"No," said Mrs. Stanforth, in her finest tone of decision. "She is a lady."

She did call, and so charmed was she with the newcomer that she soon dismissed Dr. Fullagher and called in Edith. Her likings were as decided as her dislikings, and she had fallen in love with Edith at first sight.

Mrs. Stanforth was not alone when Miss Romney was ushered in. Near the foot of her couch stood her youngest son, a child of four. Conrad, known more often as Con, was a pretty little fellow, with a round rosy face, blue eyes, and long fair curls. His baby-brow was clouded by severe anger as he stood with his sturdy little legs firmly planted apart, clutching in both hands raised to his shoulder a tiny black kitten, which he appeared to be guarding from the lawful advances of its mother.

“Muvver!” he screamed out, with a most enchanting lisp, just as Edith came into the room. “Muvver! the nathty old cat took her poor little titten baby in her *mouf*. The than’t have it—the than’t!”

The kitten struggled and uttered feeble cries; while the mother, piteously mewling, stood up on her hind legs, her forepaws resting on the breast of the stalwart young champion of the oppressed, in a vain attempt to reach the small prisoner.

Mrs. Stanforth greeted Edith with a faint smile of dismay.

"Con is not up in his natural history yet," she said, as well as she could for the noise. "Poor Frisky's mode of carrying her infant has proved too much for his tender heart. Put kitty down, Con dearest, Frisky will scratch you."

"Than't," said Con. "You're too cruel (unspellable as pronounced by Con) to have a baby, you howwid puth."

"Oh, Miss Romney, I'm sure she'll scratch him!"

"If she does I'll whip her!" cried Con.

"Then that would be cruel; and poor Frisky has not been cruel," said Edith, stooping and gently releasing the kitten. "You have made it cry, Con—do you hear? Now, when Frisky takes it, kitty won't cry."

"Mith Womney!" shrieked Con, in wild excitement. "Don't—*don't* let her have kitty! She'll bite it!"

"Indeed she won't—will you, poor old mother?" And Edith knelt down and softly stroked Frisky's head. "You see, Con, that is the way pussies carry their baby-kittens, and it doesn't hurt a bit. Pussies have no hands, you know, so they carry the little kittens gently in their mouths. And the kittens like it."

"Weally?" asked Con, sucking a thumb in thought.

“ Yes, really.”

“ Twite jenkerly ? ”

“ Ever so gently—far more gently than you or I could. You will see. When I give kitty to Frisky, kitty will stop crying. Would you like to see ? ”

“ Yeth—oh ! ” cried the child, breathlessly.

Edith put the kitten on the carpet. Frisky caught it up and made for the open door in a moment, eager to escape from Con's tender mercies. She was gone before Con had quite taken it all in. Then he elapped his hands and gave an ecstasie jump and seream of delight.

“ It thtopped ewying d'weekly—you were twite wight, Mith Womney ! ”

He suddenly made a dart at her as she still knelt on the floor, threw one ehubby arm round her neck and whispered a question in her ear, of which only the important word “ thweeth ” reached his mother.

Edith laughed.

“ Feel in my pocket, Con.”

Con felt, and with delightful results, judging from the broad satisfaction which illumined his round face, and the air of conviction with which he exclaimed,—

“ You're a bwick ! ”

“ Con ! ” cried his mother.

Con explained that that was what Alf said when cook made them a cake, and added, with a slightly bashful air, the reason for his rough compliment,

"I'm tho pleathed of you."

The round deprecating eyes carried full apology, even had an apology been needed. Edith laughed, and hugged him. He was told to share his booty with the others in the nursery, and sent away.

"I am so glad to see you," said Mrs. Stanforth, when the sturdy young feet had stamped out of hearing. "I was afraid you might be out when my note reached your house. You must forgive me for sending for you—it is quite unreasonable, when you called this morning."

"Not unreasonable at all when you wanted me," said Edith, who had taken a seat near the window.

"I knew I might count on your good nature," said Mrs. Stanforth. "And for once my motive is not selfish. I wanted to see you before you went to the Chutterworths'—you are going, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, Winnie and I are both going."

"I thought so. You will hear a piece of disagreeable news there in all probability, and I

was determined if I could to tell you the first, so that you would be prepared."

"Disagreeable news?" repeated Edith, looking surprised, but hardly disturbed.

"Oh, I am so annoyed about it," said Mrs. Stanforth, with a restless impatient movement on her cushions. "I felt quite angry when my husband told me at lunch. What do you think Dr. Fullagher has done?"

"It would be presumptuous to guess at the actions of such an erratic being."

"He has brought a new doctor to the town," said Mrs. Stanforth, with emphatic indignation. She paused to give the announcement due effect; but Edith did not look overcome by dismay. "I am so grieved on your account," went on the gentle lady; "I cannot tell you how grieved."

"Dear Mrs. Stanforth, why should you take it to heart?"

"Because it is a great misfortune," sighed Mrs. Stanforth.

"Oh, I hope not."

"But, my dear Miss Romney, a doctor introduced by Dr. Fullagher is sure to interfere with your practice. How can it be otherwise? You and the old doctor are such close rivals. He has the men of the family where you have the wives

and children, and of course as he brings his friend to the town he must have disposed of his practice to him—so you see this new doctor will be placed in the very centre of your connection. Oh, I cannot help feeling disturbed! It is a great misfortune!”

Her unchecked prosperity so far made it difficult for Edith to take this gloomy view. Success had come easily and quickly to her. She was unlearned in the school of adversity, which tutors its pupils to prompt expectation of mischance.

“Don’t let us think that it is sure to prove a misfortune,” she said, cheerfully. “Let us hope he will not be liked—no, after all, why should I say that? There is room for him as well as for me. Some one must take Dr. Fullagher’s practice—he cannot keep it for ever. It is very natural he should bring in a friend to succeed him.”

“Yes, there is that to be considered. Well, I feel better now that I have eased my mind by telling you. I am glad you can take it so philosophically.”

Edith laughed outright at this.

“Not much philosophy is needed. I was not afraid of Dr. Fullagher when I set up—I had no designs upon his practice at all; I only hoped to

make one for myself, and now that I am established it would be rather absurd to be afraid of his successor."

"You have been the consoler instead of needing to be consoled," said Mrs. Stanforth, smiling at her with a wistful look of admiration—a look very often in her eyes when turned upon Edith. "It was one of my nervous fancies, I suppose. I always take fright at once, and it seemed such a vexatious pity when you have worked so hard, and succeeded so nicely, to have you disturbed by a young man, probably fresh from college, who might just as well go and settle himself elsewhere."

"I must take my chance with other doctors," said Edith. "I should think very little of the stability or worth of a success that was only maintained by my having the field to myself."

"But you never did have it all to yourself—you won your laurels fairly in combat against the old doctor."

"Then surely I may hope to keep them against the new doctor!"

"I hope so—with probably the loss of a leaf or two."

"Oh, I can spare him as much as that. Is it not rather strange I should get the well-to-do people when I had set my desires upon the poor?"

I had dreamed of a practice chiefly amongst the lower classes, like Mr. Garthorpe's, not the rich employers."

"Horrible!" said Mrs. Stanforth, with a shudder.

"I don't give up my poor people yet," said Edith, rising.

"I must go now. I have to dress for The Elms. Mr. Chutterworth would never forgive me if we were late."

"I tremble to think of that terrible man's discourse upon Dr. Fane," exclaimed Mrs. Stanforth.

"So that is my rival's name," observed Edith.

"Yes. If Mr. Chutterworth *has* heard, and of course he has, you will probably hear nothing else talked of, unless he has made a new purchase, or added some improvement to his wonderful house."

"How you do dislike him!"

"Oh, he rasps me! I cannot endure him!"

"Now, I don't dislike him altogether; he has been very kind to us in his way, and he rather amuses me."

"I never could get amusement out of odious people," sighed Mrs. Stanforth. "But I must not keep you, Miss Romney. Can you spare time to come in to-morrow, and give me an

account of the evening? Mr. Stanforth is not good as a reporter; he rarely notices the things that interest me most."

"I will come with pleasure. But you know I am not quick at observing those sort of things. I will make an effort to-night on your account."

"Do; and tell me all that is said about Dr. Fane. I am chiefly interested about that. The rest will be as before, I suppose."

As soon as Edith entered her own house a soft brown head appeared over the banisters.

"There are no messages, Aunt Edith, so come and dress at once."

Edith laughed and ran upstairs.

"I shall be ready in time," she said.

Winifred, a dainty figure in white, followed her into her room.

"Is Mrs. Stanforth ill? I was so afraid she would make you late."

"She didn't want me professionally—only to tell me a piece of news. It seems a new doctor has taken Dr. Fullagher's practice."

Winifred, who had been executing a few dancing steps in the buoyancy of her spirits, stopped with the right foot in its dainty satin slipper pointed forwards.

"He won't hurt you more than Dr. Fullagher," she said, half questioningly, half assertingly.

"No, I hope not. Oh no, I'm not afraid. Thank you for putting all my things out, dear. Have you any flowers for me?"

"These white rosebuds." Winnie flew like a fairy to a table. "They will look lovely in your black lace."

Edith's toilet proceeded rapidly. She never gave any unnecessary time to dressing, but she was always well and carefully dressed. This evening she wore a dress of black Spanish lace, and the soft material draped gracefully upon her tall slender figure.

When the carriage door was shut upon them and they had fairly started, Winifred expressed great satisfaction.

"No message this time," she said. "We are safe for the evening, I hope."





CHAPTER V.

BEFORE DINNER.

THE Elms stood within a considerable extent of grounds nearly a mile beyond the toll-bar. It was too far off to be included in that suburb formed by the large new houses built along the London Road, and it was decidedly larger, and in many people's eyes uglier, than any of them. Fortunately, its owner was more than satisfied with it. He was one of those lucky men who are supremely assured of the merit of all their possessions and belongings.

He was standing now before the brilliantly ornamented fire-place, engrossed in the ever dear delight of being the chief person in the company. His large, new, and gorgeous drawing-room—for his self-importance had caused him to take a share in its furnishing too active for the interests of good taste—was further brightened by groups of well-dressed guests, including a few of the best people in the town amongst them, and it may truly be said that Mr. Chutterworth “loved

to look on a scene like this." He was short and stout, with a large, broad face, framed by a fringe of russet whisker and beard, which, by growing under the chin and cheeks, exposed the full breadth of the face it might more happily have partly hidden. His hair was darker than his whiskers; there were no threads of grey, but he was becoming decidedly bald at the crown. In the day-time, Mr. Chutterworth was as a rule pale; after dinner, the want of colour was made up for to a generous degree, extending even to the brow and nose. At a casual glance he gave an impression of being all dazzling shirt-front and jewelry, for though he was only too proud to conform to the strictest etiquette of evening dress, and would not have come short had fashion decreed a monk's eowl, he had made the most of his limited opportunities for splendour, and so successfully, that he had nearly destroyed the elegant sombreness which characterises man's evening attire. His front was so expansive, the diamond studs so large, while the two massive watch-chains with their bunches of miscellaneous pendants hid what modest inch or two of waistcoat there was. His hands, broad and ample like his face, and encased in gloves of innumerable creases, were hooked by the thumbs into the armholes, so that

altogether he presented a snowy and glittering front.

His wife had taken advantage of a pause between the arrivals and had sunk down in shining purple satin upon a low chair at the right of the fireplace, and was talking to the lady near. Mrs. Chutterworth was exactly the same height as her husband, and was a kind-hearted, homely, and ignorant woman. She felt the burden of her prosperity, her large house and grand furniture, her fine clothes and carriages, more than the pleasure, for she lacked the merest beginning of her husband's overweening ambition and love for display. Her only cause for rejoicing in their wealth was the luxury it gave her children.

The lady next her hostess, leaning forward with an eager exaggerated manner of interest, was diminutive and youthful-looking. Her quick restless eyes glanced everywhere, her smiles were constant; she laboured too evidently and too nervously under the necessity of making herself agreeable to everyone. Mrs. West always agreed to the remarks made by her companion for the time being. Her manner was flattering to Mrs. Chutterworth; kindly and unpretentious as she was, she had no objection to being looked up to with uncritical envy and admiration, and accordingly she liked Mrs. West, for as she

herself explained, she "always felt at 'ome with her."

Glancing from Mrs. West, little, restless, and girlishly attired, to the tall, majestic woman standing erect on the opposite side of the fireplace, no one would have supposed them to be sisters. This large and imposing-looking lady was Miss Harrison, the successor of Miss Jacques, and the principal of the fashionable ladies' school—"the school for anyone as is someone," as described by Mr. Chutterworth in one of his favourite phrases. There was something stiff and aggressive in this lady's attitude, as she stood rigidly upright, emphasising the remarks made in a deep unsympathetic voice, with the somewhat alarming action of her closed fan. Her dress was of the severest simplicity—a black velvet skirt, quite plain, and a bodice like a jacket, with turned-down collar and pockets. Her dark hair was short, and while her sister smiled constantly, a smile was the rarest thing seen on Miss Harrison's stout red face. She was talking to Mr. Ardley the elder, who wore the patient look of a man who endures. Mrs. Ardley, the second of that name, was suffering even more severely than her husband under the tongue of the lisping and talkative Mr. Milward. The poor woman always suffered when engaged

in talk in society. On ordinary festive occasions she endured little short of a nervous martyrdom. Before marriage she had been a dressmaker, and the remembrance of her lowly origin obtruded itself at all times and in all places. She had not Mrs. Chutterworth's happy ease, and independence of grammar—unfortunately for her peace of mind, Mrs. Ardley knew just enough to feel her deficiencies. Mr. Ardley had taken some pains in educating her after their marriage, and she had profited to the extent of acquiring a more correct pronunciation, a subdued manner, and a nervous dread of betraying her ignorance on things in general, and of the usages of society in particular. Dress was a sore subject. She distrusted her own taste, which led to gay colours and the extremes of fashion, and fell back on black chiefly as being always "lady-like"—for above all things she dreaded to be conspicuous, and fine dressing would have suggested professional familiarity to the ill-natured. A few unpleasant rebuffs in the early days of her married life, when she was as frankly ignorant as Mrs. Chutterworth, had made her sensitive on this matter for the rest of her days. Her aim was that quiet elegance and propriety of attire, technically described as stylish, which she was able to recognise in others, but which

she was never confident of having secured herself. She was pretty, and comparing her with the other women in the room one would have said that she had succeeded in her aim,—lately, however, Mrs. Ardley had fixed her standard higher than these Wanningster ladies, and her model had not yet arrived. She had adorned herself with her usual undecided, unsatisfactory care, and was anxious to test her success; and meanwhile it was hard upon her that Mr. Milward, the universal critic, with the town-wide reputation of being such a clever man of science, of art, and of literature—it was hard upon Mrs. Ardley that he of all persons in the room should have taken upon himself the task of victimising her, and still harder that his talk should be (as she vaguely gathered from certain terms) upon some scientific subject. He was earnestly explaining—something; he even asked her opinion! Mrs. Ardley, except on a few purely feminine matters, always went to her husband for his opinion, and quoted him on every occasion; but she had no opportunity of submitting this matter to him, even had she been able to say what she wanted his opinion upon. Her faint smiles, her judicious expressions of intelligent attention—"Yes!—Really!—Indeed!"—these helps to conversation

broke down in utter flimsiness before Mr. Milward's direct—"Now what do *you* think, Mrs Ardley? How do you think it can be managed?"

Mrs. Ardley smiled nervously at the enthusiastic brewer. Mr. Milward was considered to possess a fine face. The soft grey hair and beard claimed respect, and if the mouth was weak, the brow was fairly broad, and the expression was gentle and amiable. He gazed at his companion with searching appeal, absorbed in his subject. The emergency was pressing. What was she to say? She had not understood a word. She dared not say "I don't know anything about it," for in her flurry she did not remember that even women whose pasts were guiltless of the contamination of tape-measures and sewing-machines might plead an uncondemned ignorance of the higher branches of science.

The door opened. Mr. Oscar Ardley was announced. Mr. Milward glanced at the new-comer, and a pleasant expression of admiration came into his pale blue eyes. "Mr. Oscar, ah yes," he lisped. "Really, Mrs. Ardley, you should be proud of having such a handsome young stepson. What is he going to be, by-the-by? One of the professions, of course."

"I think not. He has no particular leaning. Mr. Ardley talks of the office now."

"To be sure. Yes, that's very nice—it is very nice to have a son to work with you. I have my Reginald, you know."

Oscar, having greeted his host and hostess, crossed to a group of young people in obedience to an imperious signal from a tall dark girl, who held out her hand with a deepening of the rich colour in her cheeks and a beaming smile of welcome.

Oscar's artistic eye caused him a pang of extreme suffering as he shook hands, for Miss Chutterworth's attire was a thing to wonder at. She shared her father's magnificence of taste, and blazed upon the fastidious young man in all the splendour of pink and deep crimson, relieved with richly-golden ornaments. She was tall and large and high-coloured, with black hair and bold dark eyes, and bade fair to equal, if not to surpass, Miss Harrison's amplitude of form. She presented a contrast to her sister Sophy, the girl who sat leaning forward in an attitude of studied limpness with her elbows on the table. Sophy was colourless, and slighter than Louisa, and these gifts of nature had pointed to the advisability of her adopting the æsthetic style of dress, when Mona Milward electrified her friends by assuming it. Some starving had been necessary to reduce her to the required lankiness of form.

and even then she was but a poor imitation of Mona, for Mona's thin angular figure, pale unhealthy complexion, and languid movements, enabled her to play the part as Sir Andrew played the fool—"more natural." Miss Milward was an authority to the Chutterworth girls; and Mr. Chutterworth's respect for a family that had been established in a flourishing business for at least two generations, made him tamely acquiescent when his younger girl went about in dresses so utterly opposed to his own taste—more like old dressing-gowns than anything else, he sometimes said discontentedly. Like Hans Andersen's sparrow, when brought face to face with the beautiful, he might have observed—"I can't see the fun of it." But where Mona led it was all right to follow, and the manufacturer derived a certain complacent satisfaction from knowing that his daughter followed an artistic and incomprehensible fashion. It had rather a knowing look, he fancied. It must give the very desirable impression that they knew what was what.

Next to Sophy sat Reginald Milward, lanky and fair like his sister, and with a long neck which gave him an exposed, if aspiring, aspect. In his hand was a book of poems. He now and then read a line or two aloud and commented

upon the fragment, for the father's gifts of criticism had descended in undiminished fulness upon the son.

Jack Chutterworth, a young man of twenty-three, made one of the group. He was very plain, and on his small face an expression of indiscriminating amiability struggled with laborious and futile efforts to appear easy and gay in the restraint of evening dress. His failure had caused Mona to turn her shoulder upon him and relapse into silent disgust, and as Jack's present aim in life was to win her good opinion—these hereulean efforts being made simply on that account—her coldness caused discouragement, and animated his efforts with the energy of despair.

Oscar had just noticed with disappointment that Winifred was not in the room, when Miss Romney and Miss Noel were announced.

Almost every eye was turned upon Edith as she walked forward. There was a natural curiosity to see her after hearing this interesting rumour of a rival. Those who had not heard the news before arriving at The Elms had been enlightened by Mr. Chutterworth, who was delighted to be the first to tell such an interesting piece of gossip. He found quite as much amusement in Dr. Fullagher's "crazes" as the

doctor found in his, and entertained for them quite as kindly a contempt; and he had playfully termed this advent of a new medical man, "Fullagher's latest." He was great on the subject, and with undoubted reason—had he not seen Dr. Fane? He had the best authority for assuring every one that it was true, "perfectly true."

"Oh yes, I've seen him. There's no mistake, I assure you."

Edith advanced to her hostess, looking, as she felt, unconscious of any special interest being attached to her appearance, and little dreaming of the pang which shot through Mrs. Ardley's breast as her quick anxious eyes examined the graceful dress, and she became all at once disagreeably aware of the newness and stiffness of her own satin robe. Mrs. Ardley watched the young doctress with a more personal interest than the others, and never even remembered the bit of news concerning the new rival.

Oscar's eyes rested on the slight girl's figure behind with renewed admiration as he thought how pretty she was in her fresh white and green leaves, looking as dainty and delicate as a flower compared with the other girls. Louisa's interest was centred on Winifred, too, and with something of Mrs. Ardley's envious feelings. While

Mona listlessly rose from her lounge and sauntered forward, ready to greet her friend when she was passed on by host and hostess.

Mr. Chutterworth welcomed Edith with cordial pompousness. "How d'ye do, Miss Romney? Delighted to see you, I'm sure. Glad your increasing professional engagements 'ave not prevented your joinin' us. 'Eard the news—Fullagher's latest, as I call it?"

"You mean Dr. Fane's coming?"

"Just so. A good joke, ain't it? You must look to your laurels, doctor, you must look to your laurels!" and, with this pleasantry, Mr. Chutterworth, in added brilliancy of spirits, turned to welcome Winifred.

Edith passed Miss Harrison and her victim with a smiling bow, shook hands with Mrs. Ardley, and took the vacant seat on the couch beside her. Mrs. Ardley's smile was constrained in answer to Edith's bright one, and she replied nervously and briefly to the pleasant remarks her envied model made—the proximity of that model intensifying her troubled sensations of inferiority and stupidity. Edith was too well used to the lady's peculiar manner and unutilated answers to feel disturbed. After admiring the weather, she relieved Mrs. Ardley from the burden of small talk, and turned her attention

to Mr. Chutterworth, as that gentleman was now speaking in tones which claimed the general ear. Mr. Stanforth was the last guest to arrive.

“How d’ye do, Rector?” cried Mr. Chutterworth, grasping his hand. “Sorry your wife couldn’t come. There’s a new chance for her—you must get this new man to prescribe for her. Oh, Miss Romney doesn’t hear,” as Mr. Stanforth cast a glance of mild warning towards the sofa. “Besides, she wouldn’t mind a little joke like that.”

Mr. Stanforth was small, slight, and grey. He wore an oppressed and melancholy air. His manners were courteous and precise, with a touch of fidgetiness.

“Then you think,” he said, with a dejected, abstracted smile, “you think that this Dr. Fane has really set up in practice in Wanningster?”

“Think? Not a bit of it. I’m sure. I’ve seen him, Rector,—I’ve seen him and spoke to him.”

“Ah,” said the Rector, helplessly. Mr. Chutterworth’s seeing and speaking to the new comer, impressive as mere facts, no doubt, did not convey the absolute certainty as to Dr. Fane’s intentions, which the speaker appeared to think. But Mr. Chutterworth had more to say.

“Called on Fullagher this morning—about

some little interior trouble of mine," with a circular wave of his hand which embraced a considerable extent of his person. "Found him fooling on with his birds as usual. How can a man waste his time over such paltry things? Now the bird for my money is a peacock. Seen my new one, Rector? Splendid fellow, splendid! You must come and see him some sunny morning. What a tail!" cried Mr. Chutterworth, rapturously. "You talk of ladies' trains, but I've never seen one as could come within a mile of a peacock's."

"We would wear peacocks' tails if we could get them, Mr. Chutterworth," said Mona, confronting the two men with a languid droop of her pale head, and holding her closed fan down in front of her with both hands. "I have often longed for a train of peacocks' feathers. Haven't you, Louisa?"

Miss Chutterworth looked dubious. "Why, I never heard that they were in fashion," she said, puzzled. Mona's remarks often electrified her friends.

"They'd look a deal more like than those queer washed-h'out—what d'ye call 'ems?—'igh h'art colours," said the host, regarding Mona's plain trailing skirt of dead grey-green with visible contempt.

Mona laughed slightly and lisped, "If you will save the feathers and give me their tails when they die, I will have them made into a train. 'There!"

"I've no doubt you will," exclaimed Mr. Chutterworth, laughing loudly. "I've no doubt you will!"

While Louisa, under a vague impression that Mona was suffering from a temporary lapse of sanity, put an agitated hand on her arm, and talked incoherently of "fashion," and of the danger of being laughed at.

"Do you think I should care?" retorted Mona.

"The din was something h'awful," went on Mr. Chutterworth to the Rector, whom he was detaining by the coat. "You know the breakfast-room communicates with one or two of the h'aviaries, and the birds was 'oppin' and flyin' about the room. One was perched on the doctor's 'ead, another on his shoulder, and two was h'eatin' sugar h'out of 'is'and. Well, canaries is pretty," said Mr. Chutterworth, admitting the fact somewhat slightly, but with an attempt at impartiality; "but they're small, and it needs a power on 'em to make the show one peacock does. I told Fullagber as much one day—I said to 'im, 'You should keep a peacock, doctor—a

peacock's worth a score of those small birds. And what do you think he said?" glancing round to gain the general attention. "He said—'Peacock me no peacocks'—What the deuce he meant by that he alone knows," explained Mr. Chutterworth, frankly. "But that's not the best of it—I 'aven't got to the best yet. He went on quite solemn—'Chutterworth,' says he, 'Chutterworth, 'ave you 'eard a peacock *speak*?' If I didn't know 'is queer ways it was enough to make one think 'im crazy. 'I've 'eard 'em *screech*,' says I. 'That's what I mean,' says he. 'Peacock? good Lord, no! I should think I was married h'every time I h'opened the 'ouse door.' Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Chutterworth, in an ecstasy. The married men joined in heartily, except the Rector, who looked slightly disgusted. Mr. Chutterworth's mirth having released his coat, he took advantage of his opportunity and sat down.

"Rich, wasn't it?" gasped the manufacturer, while Mr. Ardley, with tears in his eyes, appreciatively declared it to be "Fullagher all over."

"I should think I was married," repeated the narrator. "Ha! ha! ha! Oh, it was very rich!—But where was I?" suddenly recovering and detecting his escaped victim in a chair opposite. "I was just goin' to tell you, Rector. If a man

can be satisfied with trumpery I suppose it's just as well for 'im—it isn't h'every one as 'as money to buy the best things. Any'ow the doctor likes what he's got, for he looked as pleased as Punch lollin' back with the birds scramblin' over him. When I said, 'Good morning, doctor,' as well as I could for the row, he scowls at me and says, 'Don't bellow like a bull, man, you'll frighten the birds.' 'Oh, damn the birds, they frighten me,' says I. 'I'd rather see *you* damned,' he said at once——"

"My *dear* Joel!" gasped his wife, breaking in upon his spirited narration, and casting an alarmed glance at the clergyman.

"Beg pardon, Rector—I forgot you," said Mr. Chutterworth, with the air of one conferring a favour. "But you know Fullagher's way—Dinner? That's a blessin'! Come along, good people—I only 'ope you're all as 'ungry as I am." He glanced round in momentary hesitation. He had been prepared to take in Mrs. Stanforth, but she was not there.

Mrs. Chutterworth gave him a tap with her fan.

"Mrs. h'Ardley, Joel."

"Oh—ah, of course," and he swooped down upon that lady. "You're my prize," said he facetiously, crooking his arm.

She rose in her slow stiff way and laid the tips of her fingers upon it. Mr. Chutterworth's manners were rather too boisterous for the poor woman, who was in constant nervous fear of what he might say.

"It's a fine thing for a woman to be married," said the genial host, as he carried her off.

Mrs. Ardley coloured. "Indeed;" she drawled, quaking as to what the dreadful man might say next.

"Far finer for a man," said the ready Mona, who caught the remark as they passed her.

"Marriage don't affect 'is place at table," retorted the gallant manufacturer.

"It affects 'is dinner though, very often," said Mona; "and," she added aside to Winifred, "his temper too."





CHAPTER VI.

LOUISA GIVES HER OPINION.

“I did very well note him.”—*Hamlet*.

“It’s nater to be curus.”

Letter of Mr. Ezekiel Biglow.

“WELL,” said Mr. Chutterworth, when dinner had fairly begun, “about Fullagher, Rector. It was past eleven, and he was still in his dressing-gown, and he looked as far from starting on his rounds as you or I. He went on playing with the canaries as if he’d no notion of askin’ ’ow I was, till I thought it more than time to get to business. ‘Yes, yes, they’re pretty,’ said I, ‘they’re pretty enough—though I can’t h’enter into your likin’ for ’em. Can you spare me a minute, doctor? I’ve called to see you.’ ‘I see that,’ says he. ‘I mean professionally,’ I said. ‘Oh, do you?’ says he. ‘Then, my dear sir, you’ve made a mistake, and called at the wrong place.’ You can ’ave some b’idea of my b’astonishment. I fairly stared at him. I’ve ’eard of people not believin’ their *h’eyes*, but if ever

there was a case when a man couldn't believe 'is *h'ears*, that was one. He smiled and said as cool as you please—"I've retired." Well," said Mr. Chutterworth, looking down each side of the table at this interesting climax of his story, and noticing with a successful narrator's pride the looks of interest directed towards him, "I must confess to feeling taken aback when he said that. I daresay I showed as much, for I stared again, and he looked uncommonly pleased. 'Yes,' says he, 'I've retired. No more d— (I beg pardon, Rector),—no more doctorin' for me.' 'Then, by George! what am *I* to do?' said I pretty quickly. 'Well, there's Garthorpe,' says he—"decent fellow, Garthorpe. He'll tell you to go on as you h'are, and get plenty of warm drinks. You'll like his prescription, Chutterworth—you like warm drinks, you know." I could have sworn at him," said Mr. Chutterworth, in the tone of a man who only adopted that mode of relief under extreme provocation.

"Why didn't you, Mr. Chutterworth? It would have done you both good," said Mona.

"As efficacious as a seldom-used stimulant," murmured Oscar, an aside which made Winifred smile, and brought a sudden jerk of laughter from his taciturn father. Louisa was the only other person who caught the words; but they

conveyed no meaning to her, and her blank incomprehension made her resent the bright glance which passed between Oscar and Winifred.

"That's my saucy girl all over," laughed Mr. Milward, while Jack appeared to find the sauciness exquisitely amusing.

"Well, to tell the truth, I believe I *did*," admitted the host, an admission which caused some laughter. "Now you bring me to book," added Mr. Chutterworth with a pompous smile, "I must admit giving him a pretty thorough peppering. But he only laughed and fooled on with his con—er—his birds. Then all at once he laughed louder than ever, and had to wipe his eyes as he said, as cool as a cucumber, 'Here's a patient for you. Fane—one of our town magnates, you perceive, by the way he objects to being kept waiting.' I wheeled round," said Mr. Chutterworth, with the air of one telling a sensational story, "and there, sure enough, stood a man I'd never so much as set h'eyes on before, who 'ad come in while I was blowing up the old doctor." Mr. Chutterworth paused, and cast an impressive glance at his audience.

"Ah, indeed," murmured Mr. Stanforth, in dejected vagueness.

"Any connection of Dr. Fullagher's?" inquired Mr. Ardley.

"Not that I know of."

"I suppose he will have bought the practice?" observed Mr. Milward.

"No doubt—no doubt," said Mr. Chutterworth. "But when a man's introduced to another under such circumstances he naturally hasn't his wits about him to ask questions."

Mr. Ardley uttered a grunt of laughter.

"What is he like, papa?" asked Louisa. "I hope he is young and handsome," flashing what was intended to be a coquettish glance at Oscar.

"Yes, what is he like? We do want some good-looking men in this town," said Mona, leaning back in her chair. "Now don't be cross, any of you—it's always understood that present company is excepted."

"Then, Miss Milward," said Jack, puzzled, "are we to conclude that we are not wanted in the town?"

"That's according to your vanity," said Mona. "I said good-looking men," she lisped.

"In that case," said Reginald, "modesty requires us to be banished."

"What is Dr. Fane like, papa?" repeated Louisa, striking in rather loudly.

"Oh, he's tall—a very personable man, my dear, very personable," said Mr. Chutterworth.

"And, as far as I could judge in one short interview, quite a gentleman."

"Like Mr. Knightley," remarked Oscar, with a safe audacity, as there was no possibility of the Chutterworths understanding the allusion. He glanced across at Winifred, but Winnie kept her eyes on her plate—a slight twitching at the corners of her lips showed that she had heard.

"What was he like?" asked the watchful Louisa.

"He was a gentleman too," replied Oscar, gravely.

"Oh, quite!" struck in Mrs. West, after Mr. Chutterworth's last remark. She had become quite pink in her nervous efforts to get a hearing. "I saw him this morning, and I thought him—"

"*You* saw him?" said her host, not approving of a rival authority on this important matter.

"Yes. My sister saw him in Spencer's shop," said Miss Harrison. "She had a good opportunity for observation."

"Yes, very good. He stood as near me almost as you are, Mr. Reginald," nodding to him across the table.

The ladies now turned their attention to Mrs. West. Few of the elder men took much interest in any further details about the new doctor. Mr. Chutterworth, slightly disgusted at Mrs. West's

claims to attention in a matter where he had expected to shine pre-eminent and alone, made no pretence of listening, but, turning to Mr. Ardley, plunged headlong into politics.

"What do you think of ——'s speech?" he demanded.

"I think he ought to be hanged and quartered," replied Mr. Ardley, who was mild and taciturn about everything except politics, his general aspect being of reserved indifference, almost melancholy. His wife was in the habit of making him out a domestic tyrant of the most exacting type, and this amused those who understood the fiction, and puzzled those who did not. Reginald Milward had on one occasion soared above the intense reasonableness of his ordinary platitudes by likening Mr. Ardley to a modern Damocles, living under the dread of his wife's scissors. This explanation of the gentleman's depression won his sister's warm approval, and coming to Dr. Fullagher's ears, made the old cynic first chuckle and caress his beard, and then express his natural surprise that young Milward was not as great a fool as he looked.

Mr. Stanforth cared nothing for politics, and took no pains to affect a liking. He leaned back, meditatively regarding the flowers and ferns before him.

Mr. Milward spared Edith the necessity of listening to Mrs. West by engrossing her ear for the scientific difficulty he was riding as his latest hobby. Something about rays of light was puzzling his versatile brain, and, in consequence, he poured his difficulty into the ear of every acquaintance who was unlucky enough to come across him during the critical time. Mr. Clutterworth had proved an intractable victim—he had cut short the full representation of the question, and refused to bring the force of his intellect to bear upon it.

“Rays of light—oh, confound them! Never heard on ’em before, and don’t believe there’s no such thing. You’re muddled with your learning, Milward—I see no difficulty at all. Light don’t come in rays—except only sunlight—it comes in a full sheet—and devilish poor quality, too, sometimes.”

Edith listened and tried conscientiously to follow Mr. Milward’s wandering account.

“You have studied science, Miss Romney,” he said, as he prepared to open the subject. “It is a pleasure to talk with one whose mind has been trained and stored with the deepest truths of nature. I think that, perhaps, after all, we are wrong to make beauty such an essential; surely mind is far more beautiful than mere

physical loveliness!—and what can be more charming, more lastingly charming, than the cultivated mental powers and the sprightly intellect of a truly accomplished woman?" said the widower, who was conquered and made foolish by every pretty girl who came across his path. He was honestly in earnest about his rays of light difficulty, but he would have been still happier had he been "poring elegant nothings," as *Jeames de la Pluche* describes it. into pretty Winifred's ear. Miss Romney was beautiful, it is true, and her beauty had had great weight in forming the brewer's opinion on the subject of lady doctors; but, like ordinary human beings, the reputation of her cleverness made him slightly ill at ease with her. He preferred the humbly receptive mind into which he could pour down his floods of wisdom and knowledge from a comparatively Jove-like height.

Miss Harrison was careful to turn an attentive ear to her sister and her questioners. If her attention was not engaged, Mr. Milward might appeal to her as the highest authority on account of her profession, and from the remarks which floated to her ears, she felt a shrewd conviction that she would not be able to settle the matter with the authoritative decision demanded by her reputation as clever schoolmistress.

“You met him in Spencer’s,” cried Mona. “Come, we shall get some satisfaction now—men never *can* tell you the most interesting details. Mr. Clutterworth is not listening, is he?” with a start and glance round. “Oh no, politics—nothing like politics for making men deaf and blind. Now, when papa meets anyone, and I, dying with eagerness to hear every particular of dress and appearance, no matter how skilfully I question him—and of course I always do that—”

“Oh always!” interjected Jack, with would-be sarcastic intonation.

“I never get anything but the vaguest generalities. He never knows how any one is dressed—not even the colour. Men never do.”

“I think there is much excuse for us,” observed Oscar. “Colour is a very complex thing now.”

“Rather!” cried Jack. “I met you in Market Street this morning, Miss Milward, and for the life of me I couldn’t make out what colour your dress was.”

“That’s just what I say. Men observe nothing.”

“But I observed to any amount! I turned round when you passed and stared after you.”

“I am glad you have told me how you behave when you meet ladies you know, Mr.

Chutterworth. I shall make a point of dropping into the nearest shop when you loom in sight, and I shall not emerge until the shopman tells me the street is free."

"Oh, I've good eyes—I should see which shop you went into," said Jack, cheerfully.

Mona turned her shoulder. "Go on, Mrs. West. Let us hear about this romantie meeting. Were you in Spencer's first, or was the great man?"

"I don't know about his being great, except indeed in being tall," said Mrs. West. "He is very tall," with a laugh—"quite as tall as Dr. Fullagher. But he was in first. Spencer—you know how dreadfully fussy he is over any one that enters his shop?"

"By the bitter experience of many entrances," said Mona.

"Yes, really," put in Mrs. Chutterworth. "That's the one h'objection I have to the shop. If it wasn't that it's the best in the town I should give h'up going, for one can't get h'inside the door but he comes h'up bowin' and smilin' and sayin' something about the day. I like to do my shoppin' peaceful, and without no notice took by h'anyone, except only those who is paid to serve you. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Hoscar?"

“Indeed, yes, Mrs. Chutterworth. Mr. Speneer’s notice blights the beauties of his goods, and makes one choose anything rather than the article he becomes hysterical over.”

“I’ve never seen him hysterical, poor man,” said kindly, innocent Mrs. Chutterworth. “Had I known he suffered from hysterics I wouldn’t have spoke against him—but really he is too pushing by half.”

“That being settled, good people, let Mrs. West proceed,” said Mona. “How was he showing his delight at having secured a new customer, Mrs. West? Was he hugging Dr. Fane?”

“My dear! no, of course not. He had only taken him upstairs to look at the art exhibition.”

“Only? Mrs. West, I had no idea you were sarcastic!” said Oscar.

“Why, the poor man would be made bankrupt in notes of admiration!” cried Mona. “He ought to have been warned by the old doctor. Did he totter down in a very exhausted state, Mrs. West?”

“He looks strong and well, far from being exhausted,” said poor Mrs. West, who began to think the task of story-telling more onerous than it was worth. “He came downstairs as

I was looking over some drawing-copies for the children. The assistant just whispered that it was the new doctor, and so I knew who the stranger was."

"That was fortunate. What did you do?"

"Do, my dear? what was there to do? I certainly gave little glances now and then to see what he was like, for naturally I felt curious. He stayed some minutes, kept talking by Mr. Spencer, and so I had a good opportunity for observation. He has an exceedingly pleasant voice and laugh."

"And what is he like?"

"He is dark and very handsome—and he is bronzed, as if he had been in hot countries. What struck me chiefly was his manner, it is so easy and careless and frank—a manner you never see in men who have been brought up in provincial towns."

"Oh, Mrs. West!" cried Osear.

"Mrs. West!" echoed Reginald.

"Oh, I say!" depreeated Jack.

"That's splendid!" cried Mona. "Hear the eries of the wounded—oh, Mrs. West, you have avenged at least *one* of our wrongs!"

"But Mr. Oscar Ardley has not lived here all his life," exclaimed Louisa, in angry defence.

Oscar turned to her in quiet surprise, and

was still more surprised at her flashing eyes and crimson cheeks as she indignantly looked at Mrs. West and Mona. He made her an amused little bow of thanks; and Louisa bit her full red lips, more puzzled by it than gratified, and vexed with herself for mentioning him. Matters were not improved by her mother.

"No, I'm sure," she said, with a glance of kindly admiration at the young man. "You're quite right, Louisa, my dear; and indeed it would be a person very hard to please as wouldn't see that Mr. Hoscarr's manners and appearance was h'everything nice and gentlemanly."

"Oh, mother!" gasped the girl; and then, a little louder, and in a tone meant to give more than a hint, "Isn't it time we went to the drawing-room?"

Mrs. Chutterworth obediently rose. Louisa pushed back her chair with a jerk, and swept past Oscar, who held the door open for them, with her burning face turned aside. "The girl has a temper," thought he.

Mona gave him a saucy nod and laugh as she languidly trailed by, and Winifred, who followed the fantastically attired young lady, looked up and smiled. That look and smile made Oscar resolve to hasten his return to the drawing-room.

Now that the ladies were gone, Mr. Chutter-

worth spoke out his real sentiments on the subject of Dr. Fane.

"Amongst h'ourselves, you know," said he, assuming a confidential air, "I don't mind saying that I think 'is comin' a good thing for the town. We want a good man. Fullagher's gettin' past work a little—though he would swear if he could 'ear me say so—and he's freaky, deuced freaky. Really, he 'as h'only 'imself to blame for losin' so many of 'is best patients. Before Miss Romney came people were obliged to 'ave 'im—that is, people of h'any position," said Mr. Chutterworth, with a gratifying consciousness of belonging to the class he referred to. "And he knew it and took advantage. That sort of thing doesn't do, you know."

"No, no; certainly not," assented Mr. Stanforth, remembering his wife's dislike to Dr. Fullagher.

"The truth is," said Mr. Milward, putting the tips of his fingers delicately together, and speaking with the confidence of one who knew the exact nut-shell containing the whole matter. "the truth is, Fullagher is just a trifle old-fashioned. He is a very good sort of man—a rough exterior, perhaps, but sound at the core—but he is narrow. That is all I have against

him. In his own line he is clever, but he has no sympathy for anything beyond. He lacks breadth sadly."

"No doubt that's about the tune of it," said Mr. Chutterworth, passing the wine to the brewer. "For my own part, I'm glad a new man 'as set h'up. We need 'im. A lady-doctor is a fancy sort of h'article that won't wear well, if I'm not very much mistaken. As long as no one's dangerously h'ill, it's all right, and a nice h'amusement for the ladies, and of course one likes to give her a lift; but when h'anything serious is the matter—well, it'll be quite h'another pair of shoes. Dr. Faue will be an h'addition to the town, I can see that. I know what's what as well as h'any man, and I liked his looks. Strong, capable, h'energetic, none of your womanish, milk-and-water men." This was added on the impulse of the moment, an impulse of contempt at seeing the Rector shake his head and pass on the wine without helping himself. "We want a strong man's 'and on the medical 'elm of a flourishing town like Wanningster," added the host, plunging recklessly into metaphor. "I don't mean a word against Miss Romney, you must understand—but it stands to reason she can't do as well as a man."

Meanwhile, Edith was being assured and re-

assured by Miss Harrison. The four young girls, with Mrs. West, had stepped through the open windows out into the warm, dim evening. Mrs. Chutterworth had seated herself beside Mrs. Ardley for a comfortable chat on congenial domesticities.

“How are you off for servants now?” she began, placidly and confidentially.

With Mrs. Chutterworth Mrs. Ardley felt at ease—the ease of conscious superiority. She knew there could be no danger of criticism from that ignorant, good-natured woman, while her defiance of grammar and erratic management of her aspirates afforded Mrs. Ardley the pleasure of a comparison that told greatly in her own favour. She tasted the sweets of personal refinement and culture in Mrs. Chutterworth’s society. If only all her acquaintances had been content with Mrs. Chutterworth’s knowledge and taste for simple, everyday topics, society would have been delightful to her. But the Milwards, with their queer, out-of-the-way bits of learning, their books and their quotations, were three several terrors to her. Her stepson, also, shared their uncanny facility for tossing about lines of poetry and only half-finished sentences. These fragmentary remarks were as intelligible as an unknown language to Mrs. Ardley. She found it

hard enough to remember any facts she read about, but the words, and words, too, which apparently had no sense—this was to her nothing short of magic.

She settled herself with relief to talk to her hostess.

“Oh, pretty well,” she drawled “But Mr. Ardley is so hard to please.”

“Oh, gentlemen are always particular. I know Mr. Chutterworth—” and so on.

“I want to talk to you, Dr. Romney,” Miss Harrison had said as soon as they reached the drawing-room, and she drew Edith to sit beside her on a couch.

Miss Harrison always gave Edith the benefit of her professional title—she did so as a matter of principle. It was her mode of expressing her encouragement and approbation. A woman who broke the fetters of slavery as successfully as Edith had broken them, deserved the encouragement of all right-feeling persons. Miss Harrison had earned an incontrovertible right to the possession of independent opinions. She could afford them. Her position was assured. Wanningster believed in her with sublime faith. Her manner had so greatly impressed the inhabitants with the idea of “style,” that they were as anxious to send their daughters to her as

before they had been unanxious to send them to the quieter Miss Jacques. Miss Harrison had dazzled them by the fashion of her way of doing things, the daily routine, the number of masters, her fashionable house and furniture, and, above all, her imposing self. She transformed the school, and the transformation exactly suited the taste of her public. "Wanningster Modern School for Young Ladies" soon became the largest in the town, as well as the showiest and most expensive. Miss Jacques, obliged by necessity, had given in to the people. Her successor made them give in to her, and obtained influence and respect accordingly. She allowed herself the luxury of holding advanced opinions on Women's Rights, and so far her "parents" had submitted with admirable docility, rather proud than otherwise of the eccentricities of the distinguished principal.

Miss Harrison had hailed the advent of a lady-doctor with the most loyal enthusiasm. She had called very soon to express her pleasure and admiration, and to welcome Miss Romney as a kindred spirit, and a great addition to the cause. Had her own ardour been less absorbing, it might have been a surprise to her to find Miss Romney lukewarm on the subject. But she had too vivid a preconception of what must in

necessity be Edith's eager and devoted champion-ship of the cause she had so nobly advanced to miss the eagerness and devotion in words. Indeed, she would have considered it as absurd as unnecessary to make any inquiry into Edith's convictions—were they not proved?—proved as clearly as the most “*emphatic warrant*” could prove them by those letters after her name? She was taken on the credit of her achievement.

Miss Harrison not only talked—the test of her faith being put she did not fail. Edith was employed as medical officer of health in her large establishment, and the girls were edified and interested by having a woman to feel their pulses and prescribe for their bad headaches and colds.

In acting thus courageously, Miss Harrison was of opinion she was doing almost more to advance women's rights than Edith herself.

“For after all,” she would say to her sister, “it is the coming generation we must hope to influence. By accustoming these girls to the attendance of a lady-doctor, they will grow up with confidence in the powers of their sex, and lose the sense of its being anything unusual; and then they, in their turn, when wives and mothers, will feel it as natural to employ a woman as we do now in employing men.”

Perhaps Miss Harrison was a little sanguine.

The arrival of a new doctor, and he an attractive, unmarried man, proved a disagreeable shock to her. She saw in him a powerful rival—a severe test of Wanningster's advancement. She almost lost sight of the personal nature of Edith's interest—to her the approaching struggle was one of prejudice against enlightenment, of conventionality against advancement, of the freeing of one sex from the tyranny of the other. This broad view filled her with excitement, not unpleasurable. She was eager for the tug of war.

"I don't think you need be afraid," she said to Edith, amongst many other remarks. "I do not think this new doctor will do you serious harm."

"I hope not," said Edith.

"I shall look on for the next few months with intense interest. I shall watch the struggle most narrowly; and, you may depend upon it, we shall all rally round you—yes, all—almost all—I cannot speak for one or two—there are always some people who will change for the mere sake of changing—but I think Wanningster won't be found wanting after progressing so far."

Edith smiled. "It seems to me there need be no struggle," she said brightly, and with steady confidence in her beautiful clear eyes. "We

need not interfere with each other. Wanningster is large enough for both."

"Surely you are forgetting how you interfered with Dr. Fullagher?"

"No. I'm afraid I did. But there are plenty of people for another doctor, and I can only take the women and children, you know. And there are the poorer classes—the classes I want so much—who will go to Dr. Fane, for they seem strangely prejudiced against a woman."

"Ah!" said Miss Harrison, with long-drawn significance. "They want education," she added, impressively, as she opened her fan. "You won't do anything with them for the next fifty years."

Outside it was still twilight. On the lawn the balls and rackets lay as they had been thrown down that afternoon. Louisa sauntered over the grass, and amused her sullen mood by kicking the balls about. Sophy put herself into a languid attitude on one of the terrace seats and gazed into vacancy, occasionally uttering a monosyllable in reply to Mrs. West, while Mona stood near, with her arm round Winifred, and her head drooped ever and anon to her friend's shoulder. After paying a slight tribute to the great topic at dinner, she chose the unfortunate Rector for the subject of her discourse.

"He looked careworn at dinner. I wonder if women carry their domestic worries so plainly in their faces. Do you think they do?"

"A great many do," said Mrs. West, who had a low opinion of her sex.

"Mrs. Stanforth is not well," observed Winifred.

"Oh, my dear! he is used to that! Her ill-health would not disturb him half so much as finding his boots not polished to his liking."

"Isn't he fond of her?"

"Indeed he is. Too fond. It isn't that—it's the man's nature to worry," said Mona. "Once, when I was staying at the Rectory for a day or two, papa and Reginald being away, that catastrophe happened, and he talked about those unhappy boots for two hours."

"My dear Mona!"

"I assure you—I wouldn't exaggerate for the world. I bore it for half the time, wishing to lessen Mrs. Stanforth's martyrdom by sharing it with her, and then I was glad to escape to the nursery to play with the children. But, when I went down again an hour later, Mr. Stanforth was still eloquent on the same theme."

"Let us suppose he had talked of other subjects while you were upstairs. Probably your entrance revived his grievance."

“Not a bit of it,” said Mona. “I know him too well to suppose that. Why, my dear Winnie, he only stopped then because the brilliant idea came to him of showing the erring servant how boots ought to be polished. If his energy did not find vent in practical outlet his poor wife would be talked to death. The story I like best about him is the scrubbing one—it is too delicious. The maid was scrubbing the hall, and something in her manner of work displeased the Rector. ‘Do you call that the way to scrub?’ exclaimed he, in fine wrath. ‘Give me your apron!’ He put on the apron, and went down on his knees, while the girl stood by, quite content, no doubt, at having her work done for her. The bell rang, and some ‘people of importance’ asked if Mr. Stanforth was at home. ‘Oh yes, ma’am, if you would just step this way,’ and the girl led them to the end of the passage, where the Rector knelt in his clerical coat and housemaid’s apron, scrubbing with might and main. I think Susan, or Maria, or whatever her name was, had a very neat revenge.”

“Very,” said Winifred. “Do you know who these important callers were?”

“Oh, their name has not descended to fame with the story. They were not townspeople.”

"No ; I thought not."

"I see. You are sceptical." Mona turned her head as one or two black-coated figures stepped out on to the terrace near them. "Just in time, Mr. Ardley ! I want you to help me to convince Miss Noel—first of all, you are sure the Rector is not following you ?"

"Quite sure," replied Oscar. "He is talking about the iniquities of servants with Mrs. Chutterworth. They are interchanging experiences."

"There !" cried Mona triumphantly to Winifred.

"I don't quite see how that proves the scrubbing story," said Winifred, laughing.

"It proves that he is that kind of man. Now. Mr. Ardley, is not the scrubbing story a true one ?"

"I fear there is no doubt about it," said Oscar, regretfully. "I was brought up to believe in it, and one cannot doubt the cherished traditions of one's youth. You do not know how very domestic Mr. Stanforth is, Miss Noel. He would always be able to earn a respectable living as a working house-keeper, and a most efficient help he would prove to any burdened household. Of course you have heard about that famous Christmas turkey ?"

"No ; I have not. Did the Rector cook it ?"

“As much as he could. You see, morning service had to be performed—all he could do was to take advantage of the Psalms and Te Deum, and pay visits to his kitchen while the choir sang. He is very particular about cooking.”

“Regular old maid,” put in Jack. “Mends the children’s slippers and works the sewing-machine.”

“Monday is his mending-day,” added Mona. “Darning is his relaxation after the severe toils of Sunday.”

“Miss Noel does not like to hear these little facts about her Rector,” remarked Oscar.

“Well, they’re true, any way,” exclaimed Louisa, rustling up to them. “Mother and I called once, and found him running dusters through the sewing-machine. That’s a fact.” She looked at Winifred as though she dared her to contradict the remark. The hostility was so evident that Winifred felt a shock of dismay. What was the matter? Louisa was out of temper, but what had she, Winifred, done to bring it upon herself?

“It was kind of him to save Mrs. Stanforth the trouble,” she said, hesitating, and colouring a little.

Oscar, annoyed and disgusted with Louisa, turned to her with a polite request for a song.

"I can't sing this evening—I'm hoarse," said she, perversely.

He did not press the request, as it was certainly his duty to have done, but merely murmured some slight expression of regret and joined Winifred, who had moved a step or two aside.

He had come out anxious to exchange a word or two with her about the news he had just heard. The office of condoler was pleasant when it gave him the opportunity of speaking confidentially to a pretty girl. He was very willing to avail himself of the opportunity, and his annoyance with Miss Chutterworth made him the more desirous to comfort Winifred.

"It's a great pity about this new man coming to the town," he said. "This Dr. Fane—had you heard about it before?" He spoke in a lowered voice—a voice meant only for her ear. soft and kind.

"Just before we came. Aunt Edith heard at the Rectory."

"I am very sorry about it," said Oscar, earnestly. "I hope he won't hurt Miss Romney."

"Oh, I hope not!" The tone was not at all apprehensive.

Indeed how was Winifred to fear any common trial just then? Oscar's confidential manner, his

kind regret, his dark eyes looking earnestly down into her face, filled her with a strange, delicious sensation of exultation and happiness. She was not likely to dread any possible disagreeable in the future when he had made her forget even the present disagreeable of Louisa's temper. She did not know why she felt thus—she did not think of asking what it meant—her feeling of well-being and pleasure was too exquisite for analyzing. She felt it as, it may be supposed, flowers feel sunshine.

Louisa's angry and undisciplined heart swelled when she saw them. Oscar's lukewarmness about her singing had hurt her deeply. She watched them a moment in a state of stupefied wretchedness and frantic jealousy, and then, turning sharply, she swept through the open window into the drawing-room.

The great chandeliers were lit now; and coming into the blaze of light out of the dim quiet evening, she was obliged to shade her eyes with her hand. The scene was peaceful. Mr. Chutterworth was talking vigorously on town improvements to Mr. Ardley, who appeared at least partly awake. Mrs. West had joined herself as an eager listener to the duet upon servants between Mrs. Chutterworth and Mr. Stanforth—a duet, it is needless to add, entirely in the minor

mode. Mr. Milward had again got possession of Edith, and was happily afloat on a stream of platitudes; while a small mutual improvement society, composed of Miss Harrison and young Milward, exhaustively discussed Chopin at the piano.

Mrs. Ardley, sitting directly opposite the window, was enjoying an interval of ease, when the glowing vision of Miss Chutterworth broke into the room. Mrs. Ardley envied the young lady's daring in the matter of her attire, for though to her still barbaric taste that pink and crimson dress was a dream of colour and of beauty, her artificial refinement recognized that, for some mysterious reason or reasons, it was utterly against that good taste she strove to imitate, and, therefore, was not to be admired. She stifled a sigh as Louisa swept across the floor and threw herself into the chair beside her—a sigh partly of renunciation, partly of regret at being obliged to talk again. Louisa, however, did not appear inclined to make any demands for talk. She fanned herself violently. Her face was flushed to a crimson not unlike the colour of her sash, and she set her teeth on her lower lip and released it in quick and agitated alternation.

“It is very warm,” drawled Mrs Ardley.

Louisa did not hear and did not answer. The elder lady, not sorry to find she might be as silent as she pleased, hid a slight yawn behind her fan.

"Mrs. Ardley," said Louisa, impetuously, "do you think Miss Noel pretty?"

The abrupt address threw Mrs. Ardley completely off her mental balance.

"What?" she said, with the brevity of olden days when she had failed to hear a remark.

"Do you think Miss Noel so pretty?"

"Well—really—I don't think I have thought about it."

"Well, *I* don't," said Louisa, closing her fan sharply, and opening it again with a rustle. "I don't think she's half as good-looking as her aunt."

Mrs. Ardley glanced coldly at Edith, and stiffened herself as a private protest against this.

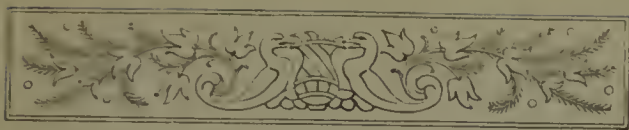
"But young Mr. Ardley seems to think she is awfully pretty," said Louisa, with a derisive laugh.

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Ardley started. "I don't understand what you are talking about, Miss Chutterworth." Louisa's eyes were suddenly arrested by something straight before her, and she forgot to answer. Mrs. Ardley looked in the same direction.

Oscar was holding the window-curtain aside for Winifred to enter the room, and speaking smilingly as she passed him. The evening air had ruffled the little light brown curls on Winifred's fair brow, her eyes shone, her cheeks were flushed, her lips were smiling—she was more than pretty at that moment. The strange new excitement had idealized her to loveliness. She stepped into the dazzling light a triumphant contradiction, as it were, of poor Louisa's denial of her looks, and was led by Oscar to the piano.

"There!" said Louisa, in low-toned passion, and the angry tears stood in her eyes. "It's pretty plain what *he* thinks of her." She shot a swift glance at Mrs. Ardley, who looked, as Louisa said after, "quite taken aback," and laughed loudly. I've put a spoke in Miss Winnie's wheel, any way, thought she. "I'm glad a really good doctor—a man—has come," she said, vehemently. "The next time one of us needs a doctor I'll get papa to send for *him*, not Miss Romney. I don't think a lady ought to do it—do you, Mrs. Ardley?"





CHAPTER VII.

THE SECONDS.

“Unreasonable dread oft chills me more
Than any reasonable hope can warm.”—*Armgar.*

“To be acknowledged, madam, is o’er-paid.
All my reports go with the modest truth;
Nor more nor clipp’d, but so.”—*King Lear.*

THE Common Gardens lay outside the town in the opposite direction to London Road. They belonged chiefly to well-to-do tradesmen. Only one, the prettiest, if not the largest, was attached to a small picturesque cottage. This cottage and garden were rented by Miss Jacques. After teaching for twenty years she had retired, greatly to her neighbours’ astonishment, when, as they said, her school was growing larger. They thought it strange she should not go on for at least a few years longer, and reap some advantage from those years of toil. But Miss Jacques had put by little and little, and the little had grown into a modest independence. She had enough to keep her without working, and she was determined to rest the last few years of her life. She

did not trouble herself because these savings would only allow her to live in a tiny house and on simple fare ; her friends' horror at her "coming-down" in the world only amused her. Recklessly, and in face of all, she chose rest and quietude in preference to the toils and anxieties of a too tardy success. She took up her abode in the little cottage on the common, and cultivated her taste for gardening in the plot of ground belonging to it. The garden not only afforded her amusement and occupation, it was profitable enough to add many comforts to her life. To say that she shocked her friends' prejudices by selling fruit and vegetables would be saying little. It was considered at first that she had cut herself off from all social respect, but as Miss Jacques appeared to think her daring as natural a thing as could be, and as she had force enough of character to make her doings accepted under the charitable veil of eccentricity, her world gradually forgot its indignation.

"Why should I not do as I like?" she had demanded. "I have earned enough to keep me, why may I not spend my earnings? There is no one to come after me, why should I harass myself to make money that I shall not be able to get any good of? And what is the possible good of working myself to death?—of perhaps

dying in harness? I can't live many more years, and if I don't get peace and quiet now, I shall never get them in this life."

So she went her own way, and for the last four years had lived as quietly and peacefully as if she had never known the fever and excitement of ambition, or longed with a sick and agonized longing for a fuller, more beautiful life, for scope for the energies of a vigorous, beauty-loving, and imaginative nature. The years wherein she had chafed against the dead sameness of a life of routine and anxiety, and desired—ah! so passionately!—something happier and more lovely than the sordid cares of precarious bread-winning, were over some time ago. One by one her hopes had sickened to death, one by one had the yearning desires for "more life and fuller" been quieted and suppressed, until the lofty plans and wishes dwindled into the one desire of a few years' rest in a small cottage.

She had not at all the air of a woman who is conscious of her life having been at best but a disappointment and a failure. She was not crushed, although each disappointment had been keenly, bitterly suffered, and although she recognized how cruelly complete the failure was. She was the last woman in the world to wear her heart upon her sleeve. The tough, indomitable

energy which had carried her through all had outlasted the old ambitions; the spirit was there, if the hopes were dead. People gave her no sympathy because she claimed none from them. She was too independent to win tenderness from her friends.

Miss Jacques did not look like a claimant for commiseration the morning after the dinner-party at The Elms, as she stood at her garden gate, overlooking the loading of a small cart with her garden produce for the market. The morning was beautifully fine—an ideal June morning. The sun shone softly over everything; the distant fields and trees were dimmed in tenderest haze; every leaf and flower glittered and quivered in clear, bright light. The birds sang.—noisily, ecstatically,—filling the air with rapturous melody. The busy scene at the garden gate was in full sunshine—there was the tiny cart of weather-stained, grey-blue colour, piled with baskets of fresh vegetables and fruit. the patient, rough-haired pony, whose red-brown shaggy coat shone warmly, the fresh-cheeked, stout, good-natured market-woman, in clean apron and picturesque bonnet, preparing blithely for the week's great festival day of business and gossip, the uneouth and smilingly-vacant countenance of Bill, Miss Jacques's "boy," who was

handing out the baskets to Mrs. Brown, and, lastly, Miss Jacques herself. She was short and slight, with a worn face, deepset, shining dark eyes, and grey hair nearly white. Her features were small and delicate. In her young days she had been handsome, and she made a pretty old lady. She had been up for an hour gathering strawberries, and overlooking Bill's preparations for Mrs. Brown; and the exercise and fine morning air had brought the faintest tinge of pink to each worn cheek.

"Six baskets of strawberries," she said, in cheerful accents. "Mrs. Brown, take care and get a good price for them."

"Can't go higher than the market, ma'am," replied Mrs. Brown, pushing in a basket between two others.

"Oh, nonsense! *My* strawberries are not ordinary market produce—they are far better than those others you have in your cart. Haven't they taste?—none of your flavourless rubbish! I think I won't let you take them, after all."

"Oh, ma'am!"

"Ah, you know they'll fetch more than market price, and you want to pocket the difference!"

Mrs. Brown chuckled, no way put out by this accusation, and Bill allowed his features to relax to their broadest grin.

"Market price, indeed!" quoth Miss Jacques, lashing herself into indignation. "Put my name upon them, and every one who knows me will know they are worth double. After all, I believe I am very foolish not to sell them privately; why, even the old doctor can appreciate them, though they are grown by a woman! He would take some of them off my hands."

"Maybe throw them to his birds after," said Mrs. Brown, proceeding composedly with the packing of her cart. "It 'ud be a pity to have beautiful fruit wasted on dumb creatures."

"Not at all," said Miss Jacques, in her peculiar clear and ringing tones. "Speaking is no merit. But you may take them this time, Mrs. Brown, and do your best with them—only be sure and get all sold. I don't want half-fresh things coming back on my hands."

"I'll do my best, ma'am," said the unruffled countrywoman. "Talkin' of the h'old doctor, ma'am, have you heard the news?"

"Not I! Have you anything worth calling news? Is he going to be married?"

Mrs. Brown had now seated her comfortable self on the little seat in the cart, and had gathered up an oft-mended pair of reins. She shook with noiseless laughter, her broad brown hands resting helplessly on her knees.

“That ’ud be news—sure-*ty*!”

“It isn’t that?” said Miss Jacques. “Well—out with it!”

“I thought you’d be sure to have heard, ma’am—about the new doctor, you know,” said Mrs. Brown, suggestively, to coax Miss Jacques’s memory.

“What new doctor?” asked the old lady, a sudden gravity darkening in her bright eyes.

“To think as you shouldn’t know!” exclaimed Mrs. Brown, in mingled emotion—pity at Miss Jacques’s deplorable ignorance, and pleasure at having the power to remove it. “Why, it’s known all over the town. He’s come a week since, and ’as taken the ’ouse next the old doctor’s—the ’ouse as was old lawyer Billson’s, you’ll remember, ma’am, as died two years since, which there ’asn’t been no one livin’ in it since, as some did say they ’ud turn it into Turkey baths, which I allays said ’ud be a pity, for it’s an ’andsome old ’ouse, and bein’ where it is in a good street, where all the other houses is lived in by respectable folks, why it ’ud spoil the look on the place—”

“Yes, yes,” said Miss Jacques, adding to herself, “It is evident you learned German in some earlier state.”

She asked a few questions. The answers were

such as appeared to leave no doubt of the truth of Mrs. Brown's news, and Miss Jacques turned away as the little cart rattled down the lane, forgetting to answer its owner's cheerful "good morning." She bade Bill make himself tidy and bring round the pony in an hour's time, and walked slowly and thoughtfully up the garden, too absent-minded to notice the sights and sounds which had delighted her so that early morning. She did not stop to listen to her favourite blackbird, nor to gaze admiringly at the blushing roses, as she had done when filled with the pleasure of that first early hour. Disappointment, her old familiar friend of former days, had laid its chill repressive hand upon her—only this time it was disappointment for another. She stopped at the rustic porch of her cottage, and looked over the lawn and garden towards the misty horizon, and her eyes were softened by a mournful wistfulness. "I hoped that she at least would win her promised land," she murmured.

The lesson taught her so perfectly by her own life was faint-heartedness. Adversity had made her expect adversity. A bad harvest of her small crops of vegetables and fruit was not surprising—but she hardly realized the fact of a good season. And where her friend was con-

earned she leapt just as quickly to a doleful conclusion as she would have done on her own account. It was only natural, only what was to be expected, that Miss Romney's prosperous career should receive a check. Miss Jacques's chilled heart had felt warmed and softened by her young friend's success. Here was one woman, at least, who had attained her fair ambition when still young, before repeated disappointments had broken the spring of happiness and taken away the power of enjoyment. She had come to the bitter belief that all went short, and it was pure satisfaction and relief—an almost religious thankfulness—to meet one exception. She watched Edith's progress with keen interest, but, unlike Miss Harrison's, it was an interest personal and affectionate. Each success gladdened her. The mere coming of a rival was to her the death-blow to these successes—successes which had been unnatural she was ready to say now.

She lingered sadly over her solitary breakfast, brooding over these dejected thoughts, and half-amused, half-ashamed, because she took this new disappointment so hardly. "I ought to be case-hardened," she said to herself, as she rose from the table to prepare for the drive. "Dear me, it's wonderful how much india-rubber there is in

human nature. I will go and see her. I must see how she takes it—whether that glorious faith of hers is at all daunted.”

It was still early when she started in her miniature pony carriage, driven by Bill, whose round cheeks were polished by the scrubbing that had been bestowed upon them. The lane was lively with farmers and farmers' wives driving in to market, the air cheerful with their brisk loud voices. Town was a mile from the common, and they soon rattled into it. As they drove down High Street, Miss Jacques caught sight of Dr. Fullagher walking leisurely on ahead with a tiny bird-cage in his hand, a red wooden cage of the commonest kind. He disappeared within a shop. Miss Jacques bade Bill stop at the same shop, and then, taking the reins, sent him into the market on an errand. She leaned back and waited, keeping a sharp look-out on the shop-door. The doctor emerged in a few minutes, with the easy deliberation of a man who has plenty of time on his hands. He smiled sardonically on beholding Miss Jacques, and, raising his hat, would have passed on, but she did not intend him to escape her. She leaned forward, beckoned, and even raised her voice a little.

“Doctor!” rang clearly in his ears, and there

was nothing for it but to obey the summons and pause beside the carriage. Miss Jacques dispensed with the usual forms of greeting.

"Is this report that I heard this morning true?" she demanded.

"Quite true," replied the doctor blandly.

"It is your doing!" she exclaimed.

"I am happy in being able to take a little credit of it to myself," he rejoined, with malicious enjoyment of her anger.

"Credit!" cried Miss Jacques.

"And your quick recognition of my claim to gratitude is extremely gratifying to me," added the doctor, bowing and caressing his flowing beard. "It is only too often that a man's services to his country or his town are ignored."

"There will be no danger of any service you may chance to render your fellow-creatures being ignored," retorted Miss Jacques. "You would talk too much about it. Any way, I owe you a grudge for this, doctor."

"I need not tell you how confident I feel about receiving payment," he answered; "I might feign ignorance of what you are alluding to, but though your attack was so sudden, I have no wish to gain time. Of course, you mean my friend Fane's coming to the town."

"So that's the man's name?" said Miss

Jacques, and added with troubled impatience, "Oh, don't talk about it! I tell you I feel disgusted beyond measure. I shall never forgive you, doctor."

"I am sorry to hear it, because I feel for my own part in rather a Christian-like frame of mind," said Dr. Fullagher, raising the cage and eyeing its occupant with interest. "Wanningster has treated me—h'm, not very well, and I feel that I am returning good for evil in thus bringing a good man into it. The town doesn't deserve a splendid fellow like Fane, and that's the truth, my dear Miss Jacques. I have a half-notion that there is something almost fine in my magnanimity—a case of coals of fire—that sort of thing."

"Oh," cried Miss Jacques, restlessly flicking her pony's back with the whip, and speaking scornfully, "if you are acting from a religious motive!"—She laughed. "I assure you, doctor. I am the last woman to object. We shall hear next of your having been seen in church."

"Oh, I won't go too far," said Dr. Fullagher, deprecatingly.

"That's consolatory—we don't want to lose you yet." She looked abstractedly down the busy street for a moment, and then turned again to the doctor, who was preparing to take his

leave. "By-the-by," she said, abruptly, "is the man married?"

"No," said Dr. Fullagher. "So far, I am happy to state, he has preserved uninterrupted use of his senses."

"Ah! so much the worse!"

"Yes," said he, with a quiet smile. "There will be a flocking of all the young ladies to his standard, for is he not 'A bachelor, and a handsome stripling, too?' The odds were against me, for I was considered hopeless, but they are all in his favour."

"You knew what you were about, doctor," murmured Miss Jacques, with ironical admiration.

"Yes—I generally do," was the modest reply. "Have you heard of his first recruit?"

"Not I." Miss Jacques spoke almost dejectedly. Indeed, she was too troubled to care even to hide her serious annoyance from the doctor, although she knew it would give him further cause for triumph.

"Mrs. Robert Harvey," said Fullagher, softly, noting the quick frown which crossed the worn delicate face.

"Mrs. Robert Harvey is a fool."

"Granted. It is the fools who left me, remember."

"And whom you wish to win back for your

friend? Well, doctor, it is a noble ambition—there is no need for me to wish you success; as things go, there is no doubt but you will succeed. I give you joy.”

“Thank you,” with mock gravity.

“I see you have been making your usual rounds,” said Miss Jacques, forcing a faint smile as she glanced at the cage in his hand.

“My weekly penance,” groaned the doctor, quite seriously. “It is all I can do to prevent myself taking a horsewhip with me into the market every Saturday—I should like to spend the day in chastising the men who sell ill-treated birds and animals.”

“You are the newest development of Don Quixote, I declare! And that is your latest rescue? H’m, it looks a melancholy prize enough.”

“Yes, poor little devil,” said the doctor, mournfully regarding the bird. “But it will look another creature in a week’s time—if you care to see it then.”

“Is it possible?” she ejaculated.

He turned his eyes sharply upon her. “Is what possible?”

“I thought no women were allowed to see your bird-treasures! If I were disposed to be ill-natured I might hold you to that inadvertent invitation.”

“Ah, I forgot—”

“Oh, I’ll be merciful! I won’t risk shocking the unaccustomed nerves of your delicate pets. Don’t be afraid, doctor.” And bidding him a laughing adieu, she gave the reins to Bill, who had returned. They drove on to Princess Road. Edith was engaged, and Miss Jacques was shown into the dining-room where Winifred sat, looking very bright and pretty in her fresh morning dress, and very daintily busy over her mending-basket.

“Aunt Edith will not be many minutes, I think,” she said, after putting the visitor into an easy-chair.

“I will wait. I am in no hurry,” said Miss Jacques, leaning back restfully. She glanced round the quiet, comfortable room, and then at the girl, whose tenderly-youthful face, soft hair, and bright expression were pleasant to gaze upon. How sunny and happy she looks, she thought; while aloud—“You seemed very busy when I came in.”

Winifred laughed. “This is the only work Sarah cheerfully yields to me as my share—she always allows me to do the mending for the house. She took it very hard when I attended the cookery-classes, and wanted to make experiments in the kitchen. Aunt Edith had to secure admittance for me.”

"How did the dinner-party go off last night?"

"Oh, very well! Everything was the best that money could get—the wines were the peculiar kinds that can only be got by money. We had this on Mr. Chutterworth's own authority, so I have no compunction in repeating it."

"You feel sure of your facts, I see," said Miss Jacques, smiling. "Go on. What else did he talk about?"

"*The* subject, Dr. Fane," said Winifred; and then added, "Of course you have heard of the latest important event that has occurred in England?"

"Of course. And Mr. Chutterworth knew last evening? How you must have suffered!"

"Not at all. I enjoyed it. I owe Dr. Fane a large debt of gratitude for the amusement he caused us last evening."

"Mr. Chutterworth would be very great on the subject," suggested Miss Jacques, who felt curious.

"Great?" said Winnie. "He was more than great. He was elephantine—he spread himself all over it."

She grasped her dress in imitation of Mr. Chutterworth's favourite oratorical attitude, and gazed at Miss Jacques with as successful an attempt at unwinking fixity of stare as it was

possible to produce with soft hazel eyes. “‘I’ve seen him, Rector—I’ve seen him and *spoke* to him.’”

“He *has*? Come, tell me some more. I delight in Mr. Chutterworth—he is one of the few men I feel a real affection for. What is the great oracle’s opinion? It has a value apart from its intrinsic one—it will be proclaimed on the house-tops.”

“The one he presented us with last evening was not characterised by the vagueness one expects in an oracular utterance. Dr. Fane is—let me see—oh, I remember!” And resuming her mimicry, “‘A very personable man, my dear, very personable—and, as far as I could judge in one short interview, quite a gentleman.’”

“Dr. Fane needs nothing further,” murmured Miss Jacques in a choked voice. “One can almost forgive him for coming to Wanningster now.”

“Ah, there goes the front door. Aunt Edith will be free,” said Winifred. “Shall I tell her you are here?”

“Thank you, my dear, don’t trouble. I will go to her.”

Miss Jacques rose and went into the room behind—the consulting-room. Edith sat at the desk hastily scribbling a note. She looked round

as Miss Jacques closed the door, and, rising quickly, welcomed her with pleased eagerness.

"I have not come professionally," the old lady said at once.

"I am glad to hear it," was Edith's cordial answer.

"You are too kind-hearted and disinterested for your profession, doctor," said Miss Jacques, smiling.

Edith only laughed and shook her head.

Miss Jacques watched her as she stood putting away a few papers into the desk with quick decided movements, and was obliged to admit that the danger of rivalry had made no difference in her expression. Indeed, she looked as bright and full of healthful vigour as the morning. Miss Jacques admired her with a full warm heart as she sat in the patients' chair, and let her eyes rest upon the tall, finely-formed figure, so easy and so beautiful in its movements, robed in its plain dark grey dress, which had no affectation of masculine imitation about it—on the blooming face with its delicately chiselled features, fair lines, and rich soft colouring, and the strong nervous lady's hands. She stifled a sigh.

Edith closed the desk, and came and sat down opposite her visitor, turning the sweet brightness of her dark eyes and smiling lips towards her.

"What a lovely morning it is!" she said with delight. "I wish I had an open carriage instead of a brougham—it would be much pleasanter. I have to go to the Hollies—I should like to walk."

"People prefer their doctors to come to them in carriages," said Miss Jacques. "You lack worldly wisdom sadly, Miss Romney."

"So you often say—I shall come to you to be taught. I must always drive?—very well—that is one thing learnt. I have something to tell you that I think will please you. You know the Nicholsons—those people in Oyster Street who keep that wretched greengrocer's shop?"

"Know them? When a man makes himself notorious by drunkenness and beating his wife, one can't fail to remember him. He is a savage."

"I fear he is," said Edith. "I have been attending Jane White, the girl who left me three months ago to be married. She lives next door to the Nicholsons, and a day or two ago, when I was in her room, there was a dreadful scene outside between this man Nicholson and his wife. He was drunk, and was ill-using her. I heard the noise, but could not see what the matter was. When I went out she was on the ground senseless, and he had taken himself off, and then women were lifting her up. She

had cut her head in falling upon a stone. They carried her into her house, and said something about sending for the doctor, but I told them I was a doctor, and would see to her at once. They stood by open-mouthed, while I did my best for her. I supposed I should hear no more of it, but the poor thing seems to be grateful, for she has sent a message this morning asking me to attend her.

"And that has pleased you?" said Miss Jacques, a little drily.

"Indeed it has!" Edith exclaimed. "I feel as if it might prove the beginning of a connection amongst the poor—the people I covet most—yes, even more than the richest and most influential families in the place. Of course, I trust to you not to betray me."

"I'll keep faith—in fact, your taste is too peculiar to be generally believed possible. But I am glad you have got the Nicholsons, because I know how much you want that kind of people. By-the-by, I only heard this morning of a rival in the lists, and I came full of disgust about it, and expecting, to tell you the truth, to find you rather cast-down."

"I was—a little, just at first," said Edith, frankly. "I think the chief reason of my being so was because I was told as if it was a great

calamity, and every one spoke of it in the same way—as if my doom was sealed,” she said, laughing. “But, surely, it is rather too early to groan. I don’t think so badly of Wanningerster as some of the people themselves appear to do.”

“Ah, my dear Miss Romney, if a miracle could be worked, I should say it might be for you.”

“You are too despondent, dear Miss Jacques.”

Miss Jacques only shook her head.

“I know that competition will probably affect my practice,” said Edith. “But I think there is room enough for both of us. Dr. Fullagher must have retired shortly, and another man must have taken his place—the inevitable is only happening a little earlier. I have been very fortunate in my start—indeed, I think I may venture to say that I am established now and need not fear.”

And she rose and leant against the mantel-piece, a trick of hers when earnestly talking.

“Ah,” said Miss Jacques, with a soft sigh, “you are young and hopeful.”

“Yes, indeed. I should be very ungrateful and unreasonable if I were not hopeful, even though I have already lost one good patient,” she added, lightly.

“Mrs. Robert Harvey?”

"Mrs. Robert Harvey? Oh no—Mrs. Godwin."

"Then that makes two. I heard of Mrs. Robert's defection from Dr. Fullagher, half-an-hour ago."

"Then it must be true," said Edith, thoughtfully. "No, I had not heard about her. She is not so ceremonious as her sister-in-law. Mrs. Godwin sent me quite an apologetic note this morning—'She was very sorry, but as the time came near she grew so nervous, and she felt that for her husband's sake she ought to run no risk,' &c., &c. I must confess that that about the risk did vex me. Nothing hurts me more than to be made to understand that people feel they are running a greater risk in putting themselves in my hands than in a man's."

"Then you will be hurt all your life," said Miss Jacques, bluntly.

"Oh, Miss Jacques, I hope not! Surely I shall overcome their prejudice in time!"

Miss Jacques relented—against her own convictions. "For your sake, I hope so," she said. "But I have unbounded faith in people's stupidity."

The servant brought in a note.

"From Mrs. Ardley," said Edith. "You will allow me to read it; I may be wanted."

“‘They all with one consent,’” quoted Miss Jacques, below her breath.

“Nothing of the kind!” Edith exclaimed. “I am to call this morning at eleven ‘*exactly*’—*exactly* twice underlined—and I must please not be a minute later, as she has an engagement to meet Mr. Ardley in the town at twelve.”

“And my husband objects *strongly* to unpunctuality—in fact, she cannot be *answerable* for the consequences if he is kept waiting for *two minutes*—she fears he would *oblige* her to dismiss Miss Romney. I know her style,” said Miss Jacques. “I have had notes from her. Well, had Dr. Fullagher continued to hold what I have heard Mr. Chutterworth describe as the ‘chief medical reins’ of the town, Mrs. Ardley would never have left you. But I won’t answer for her faithfulness now there is a choice.”

“Does she not like Dr. Fullagher?”

“She hates him. She can’t understand him, and he makes her uncomfortable by his satirical ways. It isn’t every one that can get on with the doctor. He is a queer man. He takes such decided likes and dislikes, and I think he favoured her with one of the latter from the first. He thinks you are almost everything that is objectionable.”

"I?" cried Edith, in amazement. "Whatever should he do that for?"

Miss Jacques laughed. "Because you are of his profession—I suppose being a doctor himself he is better able to judge."

"Oh, Miss Jacques!" The tone was so disturbed that Miss Jacques gave a quick glance, then rose and laid her hands on Edith's arms, looking up with serious kindness, and just the slightest tinge of mockery, into the troubled face.

"Why, my dear," she said; "my dear Miss Romney, surely you know—even you, unworldly and utterly childlike as you are in many things—surely you know what most foolish people are foolish enough to think of a woman who dares to enter the medical profession? I spoke very foolishly myself just now, and you may take it as a great compliment that I did make that speech. Do you suppose I should have done so had I not believed that you understood and despised the clatter of fools? Of course Dr. Fullagher hates you! He despises women—he regards them as fools and dolls—and naturally he is enraged when one of the dolls carves out for herself a career as good as his own, and thus upsets all his chivalrous theories. And still more must he hate the woman who, while so going her own way, brushes so inconveniently

against him. You have spoilt his practice—for, thanks to a conjunction of circumstances, Wanningster has taken you up and made you the fashion—and to punish you for your daring he brings in his handsome, attractive, unmarried friend, who is to win all from you and drive you from the field."

"Oh, let us hope not!" exclaimed Edith, laughing, though one or two phrases in this speech had struck her disagreeably. "If I take such a despairing view, how can I possibly do my work well? I will not be discouraged! You are as bad—no, you are infinitely worse, than dear Mrs. Stanforth. Am I not established? This all-conquering hero will not be such a destroying angel as you wish me to believe. It is absurd," she said, setting her lips firmly, for she felt they trembled.

"Ah, Dr. Fullagher knows what he is about when he brings an unmarried man into the place; he understands the folly of some women to perfection. My dear, keep your faith and your courage; you will need all you have! I thought things were to go so beautifully for you," said Miss Jacques, squeezing the arms she still held, and speaking with pathetic regret in her moved voice. "I was foolish enough to believe in something marvellous—a miracle to be per-

formed, and all for you!—and in defiance of what has been drilled into me ever since I was a girl of fifteen, full of vigorous life and hopes. All *my* hopes perished, but yours—yours seemed to have come to fruition. A most glorious career opening before you, and you, strong, gifted, beautiful, and young, allowed to follow it in all your freshness! Moses has always been my favourite character in Sacred History, the one I sympathised with most. He had all the toil and wear of the wilderness, the daily fretting of a discontented, fractious multitude—ah, that must have been worst of all—and died, after only getting a glimpse of the Promised Land. Many of us get our promised land when too late—most of us do not get even a glimpse, but I thought you would be a fortunate exception, and after all, there is the wilderness still to be gone through.”

“Of course,” said Edith. “I do not expect only honey and milk—I must have my troubles like everyone else. And,” she added, softly, a mist moistening her grave eyes, “I have gone through the sharpest already; no freedom from worldly struggles ever could make up for that.”

“That is always so,” cried Miss Jacques. “Our success comes, and those for whom we wished it are dead, and in their graves lies our

own power of rejoicing over it. I must go, Miss Romney. I came to tell you I was sorry, and had no idea of playing such a spirited rôle of Job's comforter. I am bitterly ashamed of myself. Here have I been keeping you from your work, pouring out predictions doleful enough to discourage the stoutest heart. Good morning,—but first tell me you don't believe a word of my croaking."

"I am not quite discouraged, certainly," said Edith, smiling.

"That's right! I believe now and then that people do get a few of their deserts, even in this world."

She looked back from the carriage and nodded, brightly smiling, to Edith standing at the garden gate in the soft June sunshine.

"You splendid, beautiful creature," she said to herself. "I have certainly distinguished myself this morning, but you will be too sensible to mind what I have said. You look fearless and undaunted—as if you could not believe in failure—and failure will be so much the harder to bear when it comes. And it will come—I fear it will come—I know the people too well. No, Dr. Fullagher, I shall never forgive you for this."



CHAPTER VIII.

THE BEGINNING.

“Le succès est presque toujours une affaire d'à-propos.”
Baron Wessenberg.

“. . . 'tis all to prevent mischief.”
The Rivals.

FIVE minutes later Edith started on her rounds. Miss Jacques had delayed her, and she took Mrs. Ardley first. As she was driven to the Lodge, her mind dwelt with some persistence on what she had heard about her rival. Against her will, against her reason, she was a little depressed. Why should the advent of a new doctor be considered of such disastrous moment to her? How was it that both Mrs. Stanforth and Miss Jacques, her best friends, had spoken of it as if, to use her own jesting words, her doom was sealed? They appeared to think it was a case of all or nothing—they recognised no possibility of a medium between the two. Mrs. Stanforth had told her the news with the solemnity befitting a calamity—indeed she had

said in so many words that it was a misfortune. Edith had taken the gravity as an exaggerated prompting of her friend's affection, and had easily thrown off its slight effects; but close upon that came Miss Jacques, with even more persistent and impressive solicitude, and Edith entertained a greater respect for Miss Jacques's knowledge of the world than she did for Mrs. Stanforth's. She had laughed, refusing to see the matter from their gloomy point of view; but the repeated gloom had certainly impressed her. One or two of Miss Jacques's remarks had forced themselves upon her attention most disagreeably; she had said distinctly that Edith's success was owing to what might be termed a combination of chances. That phrase, "Wanningster has taken you up and made you the fashion," was not pleasant to the young doctor's ears. A fashion has at the best but an ephemeral existence. She had gathered in short that her position was regarded as being decidedly insecure.

But Edith soon recovered from her slight uneasiness. How was it possible for her, in splendid health, at the height of her success, and in the full stream of activity and usefulness, to remain depressed for long in this lovely June weather? The summer air coming freshly to

her face, the easy, rapid motion, always delightful to her, the sense of well-being and of power to do well her chosen work, even the busy streets, all these had soothing and exhilarating effect upon her. The line smoothed itself away upon her forehead; the slight compression of her lips relaxed, and she leaned back, with smiling eyes lit once more by their steady confidence. She was ready, some minutes before the carriage stopped, to laugh at herself for being infected by anxious Miss Jacques's lugubriousness. She could even explain satisfactorily her most discouraging remark. After all there was no reason to consider her position less assured because she had been helped by circumstances. Dr. Fullagher's age and oddities, the people's liking for freshness and newness, had been in her favour certainly, and had smoothed her path—thanks partly to them she had gained the best practice in the town; but did not circumstances help or hinder every one? and, because she had been helped, was it necessary to suppose she held the “good things” less securely? At least the advantages were hers, however greatly her possession of them had been hastened. She could not, perhaps, expect to keep them easily and undisturbed for long; still, there was a difference between a possible uncertainty and

the throwing all down in despair at this new-comer's feet.

"I hope they will see they were wrong," she thought, smiling. Her eyes brightened with some pleasure at the exciting prospect of a contest. She felt quite equal to guarding her rights against a rival, and not unwilling to be obliged to do so. Her friends' apparent belief that her chances were over as soon as this new-comer appeared, and that she might as well surrender and cry for mercy at once, had stirred the latent combativeness in her nature. The consciousness of success, and, above all, the consciousness of ability to win and deserve success, animated and strengthened her. The carriage stopped at the Lodge gates, and Edith got out and walked up the gravel path in the perfection of healthful vigour, her head a little higher than usual, and the spirit of combat lurking with smiling defiance in her eyes.

Mrs. Ardley awaited her coming in considerable nervous agitation. That operation of "opening her eyes," so kindly performed by Miss Chutterworth the evening before, had occasioned her much disquietude. An absurd jealousy of Winifred Noel entered her breast. It is true that any girl who won attentions from her stepson would have excited the same feeling ;

but in Winifred's case, Mrs. Ardley was enabled to find excuse for her resentment in what she was pleased to consider very serious objections. Winifred was poor; she lived with an aunt who worked for her living, and therefore she was a most unsuitable connection for an Ardley. Mrs. Ardley was keenly conscious of the wide difference between the son of a wealthy manufacturer and the penniless daughter of a poor curate. "It would never do," she said to herself more than once, and in the repetition found a soothing sense of consequence. This being decided, there still remained the difficulty of preventing the mistake.

At first, indeed, the difficulties of doing anything in the matter appeared insurmountable. To speak to Osear on the subject was out of the question. She was not on easy enough terms with him to make any remark whatever upon his proceedings. She had never overcome her first awe of him, when he had displayed his disgust at the relationship with all the frankness and freedom of supercilious youth. His long absences from home, first at College, then in London, and lastly on the continent, had kept them frigidly distant to each other. Nor would complaint to Mr. Ardley be of use. He never interfered with his son.

At last the brilliant suggestion of remonstrating with Miss Romney herself entered her brain, and inspired that morning's summons. In some vague way Mrs. Ardley felt that she would speak with better effect, and be altogether less uncomfortable, in her own drawing-room; and it seemed to her quite right to summon Edith as authoritatively as she would have summoned her in case of illness. Miss Romney might of course on account of her position be treated unceremoniously.

She was dressing to go out, when word was brought to her of Miss Romney's arrival, and she leisurely finished her toilet. Jealous anger against Winifred for having the power to attract Oscar was hot within her, and braaced her nerves wonderfully against their usual flutter; yet, when she entered the drawing-room, and her visitor rose up tall and dark against the shaded window, and came forward so easily to meet her, the ex-dressmaker's heart sank flutteringly, and for a moment she wished she could feign some slight touch of illness. What would she not have given to have possessed this young lady-doctor's ease of manner, her assured composure, and the power of choosing and wearing a plain dress of such simple and perfect taste? She had felt something of the awe of ignorance at knowledge,

and what is comprehensively termed "cleverness," in regard to Edith—it had made her hold herself stiffly aloof from her young doctor, and restrict their intercourse to mere business—but she had comforted herself at the same time with the reflection that it was Miss Romney's business to be learned and superior, and that the learning was to be ignored and ashamed of in the same way as her own acquaintance with the art of dressmaking. Miss Romney, in short, being employed by her, was essentially an inferior. But it touched her nearly when a clearer perception of her inferior's beauty and grace came forcibly to her as it did this morning. Ah, why could *she* not feel as serenely composed? as perfectly safe from allusions and awkward remarks? as perfectly free and able to hold her own in society? Other women would have envied the rich beauty—poor Mrs. Ardley envied her manner and connections.

She let Edith take her cold limp fingers, and then sat down, feeling awkward and constrained, and vexed with her visitor because she felt so, and because she knew that awkwardness was not likely to trouble *her*.

"You are rather late, Miss Romney," she said stiffly, looking through the lowered venetians.

Edith took out her watch. It was five minutes

past eleven, certainly, but those five minutes had been spent in Mrs. Ardley's drawing-room, while that lady put on her painfully new-looking satin mantle and plain white bonnet. Yet how could Edith make that clear? She replaced her watch, and began a question about Mrs. Ardley's health, a question which any acquaintance would put when pressed for a topic.

"Oh," interrupted Mrs. Ardley, quickly, "I did not send for you professionally."

"Indeed!" said Edith, as she did not proceed to explain further. "I am glad you and the girls are well. I feared that Gertrude's eyes—"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Ardley. "The Miss Ardleys do not require medical attendance just at present."

She was filled with unreasoning dislike towards Edith now as well as towards Winifred, and made no effort to speak otherwise than disagreeably, for, although she could exercise self-control in the way of keeping herself quiet and neutral in society, she had none in a case of this kind, when her temper was roused, and she considered it safe to allow it full liberty of manifestation. Vulgar men and women believe they enjoy the right of insulting those who work for them; this belief held an honoured position in Mrs. Ardley's creed.

Edith, for her part, was so conscious of the woman's ignorance and presumption that she hardly resented her insolence. She only supposed that Mrs. Ardley's temper was upset, and that she unfortunately was to suffer as well as the legitimate victims of her own family. What did annoy her was to have her time taken up unnecessarily, as Mrs. Ardley made no attempt to explain what she was wanted for.

"You are going out," she said, at length. "Perhaps I have come at an inconvenient time. Shall I—"

"Oh, that doesn't matter," said Mrs. Ardley, ignoring as inconsistently as Edith had purposely ignored the fact that this was the time fixed by herself. "I must go out shortly to meet Mr. Ardley in Waterloo Street (this was her euphuism for her husband's factory), but I can spare a little time, as he does not expect me till twelve. I must not be a moment later though, for he is so particular about strict punctuality, and he would blame me very much if I was so inconsiderate. The fact is, Miss Romney, I wish to speak to you about your niece." She nervously pushed on her gloves and looked down at them. The plunge into the subject was embarrassing when Miss Romney sat opposite in serene unconsciousness, but she was determined to speak her mind out,

and her envious dislike was fast giving her courage.

"Yes?" said Edith, in a tone of attention, secretly almost aghast at this audacity, for she had some suspicion as to the reason for Winifred's name being mentioned.

"Yes. I was greatly surprised last evening to see that she was attracting my husband's son," said Mrs. Ardley, in precise tones. "And so I wish to speak to you about it."

"What do you wish to say?" asked Edith, coldly.

"You are her guardian, I presume?"

"I suppose I am," Edith replied, slowly and doubtfully, as though not quite sure.

"While she lives with you, of course you are in the position of her guardian," said Mrs. Ardley, her affected deliberation of speech gradually warming into a more offensive tone. "And I wish you to put a stop to the affair before it gets serious—of course, just now it is only a little nonsense. Young men think only of a little amusement, and pay a few attentions, and girls imagine they mean something. It is a great pity, and I should be sorry if anything of the kind were to happen to Miss Noel."

"You are very kind," said Edith, unable to resist the sarcasm.

Mrs. Ardley detected something of it, enough to warm her anger still further.

"It is always the truest kindness to stop at once any flirtation which may give rise to false hopes," she said. "And I beg you to do so, Miss Romney."

"I am afraid," said Edith, dragging out the words stiffly and icily—"I am afraid I can do nothing. I should not like to forbid Mr. Ardley to call at my house."

Mrs. Ardley pushed back her chair with a hasty, awkward gesture, a revival of her old freedom of movement, and flushed with anger.

"I should think not!" she exclaimed, and muttered a word or two below her breath, of which the one "impertinent" only came to her visitor's ears.

"I am sorry you have spoken to me about it," Edith said. "Don't you think it would be more effectual to speak to Mr. Oscar Ardley himself? I cannot possibly presume to influence him."

This touched a sore place, and made Mrs. Ardley grow still hotter.

"We will say nothing about that, if you please," she said. "Of course, your speaking to Mr. Oscar Ardley is out of the question. I only wish you to influence your niece, Miss Romney: for I may as well tell you frankly, that however

much she encourages my stepson, his father would never allow the match. No, never," she said, emphatically. "The very idea of it would displease him very much—that I am convinced of."

"Perhaps you will be kind enough to tell me what you think would be Mr. Ardley's objections?"

"Really, Miss Romney, you surprise me very much by asking such a question!"

"I cannot surprise you as much as you have surprised me."

"Of course, you dislike my interference—it is only natural you should wish your niece to——"

"Oh, no! you are quite mistaken!" cried Edith, rising in her scorn, and moving nearer the window. "My thoughts on the subject have not gone a quarter as far. But as you are pleased to mention the matter, I must assure you that neither my niece nor I would be willing that she should enter a family that objected to receiving her. And now will you please tell me what these weighty objections are?"

"As if they were not as plain as daylight!" exclaimed Mrs. Ardley, fuming at the little impression she could make upon Edith—being employed by the family, the least she could do was to receive the caution meekly, and promise prompt obedience to it. "You must see your-

self that Miss Noel would make a very bad match for my stepson. He ought to look very much higher."

"I fear I cannot see it in the same light," said Edith, haughtily. She was about to say more, but checked herself in sudden self-scorn. What was the good of taking the trouble to argue seriously with one so ignorant and insolent? She was intensely angry, but she was wasting her time, and it was absurd to discuss the subject at this stage, at least. So she said gravely, "It seems to me a little premature to talk about this, and I hope your fears for Mr. Oscar Ardley will prove to have been unnecessary. I have a great deal to do, and I am afraid I cannot spare any more time."

"Oh, I do not suppose for a moment that my stepson means anything serious," said Mrs. Ardley, rising from her chair as Edith made a step forward in order to take leave, and retreating a few steps. "I have no fears for *him*," with a disagreeable laugh. "But girls are generally so vain and foolish, and I wished to prevent disappointment. However, as you have taken my remarks in such ill part, and refuse to comply with my request, nothing more need be said. It is not the way to behave if you wish to get on in your profession. Miss Romney, and I

think you will find it necessary to be very careful now there is a clever new doctor in the town. People will not be so ready to put up with a disagreeable manner when they can employ a skilled medical *man*. But, really, I must waste no more time," and, without a word or sign of farewell, Mrs. Ardley turned round and walked towards the opposite door.

Edith's "Good morning" received no answer. Mrs. Ardley disappeared into the next room, leaving her visitor to find her way out of the house as best she might.

Edith threw herself back in her carriage with a sigh and flush of annoyance. As soon as her anger at Mrs. Ardley's audacity was a little cooler, she began tormenting herself with doubts as to whether she might with careful management have conducted the interview to a more peaceful conclusion. The full significance of Mrs. Ardley's parting speech was not lost upon her—it amounted to a very decided threat of dismissal. Could she have avoided this? For the first time she felt the want of that tact and knowledge of the world with which Miss Jacques so often laughingly taxed her. The first time the suggestion had been made to her of the necessity for "managing" people if she wished to succeed, it had struck her as an unworthy one. They

knew her to be qualified, they employed her if they desired her services—what had management to do with this? The case was simple. And the rapid growth of her practice had naturally appeared to carry out her theory. But she was beginning to find that it was not only a case of being accepted, or of being passed over, as the public chose. More than professional qualifications were needed, more than the readiness and power to work, and this something more was a knack of management, which Edith had till now despised most heartily and never needed, but which, she was beginning with some disgust to find, would be perhaps necessary after all, when competition pressed her harder.

It might be so, still she did not think she could have crushed down her pride and heard Mrs. Ardley meekly.

“Too bad to bring up poor Winnie’s name,” she thought—“unpardonable of Mrs. Ardley. However, I won’t tell Winnie anything about it—there is no need to trouble her. Mrs. Ardley’s courage may fail when it comes to a change. She doesn’t like strangers, and she may find it difficult to explain her caprice to Mr. Ardley.”

The carriage stopped at the Hollies, and she opened the door.

“Now for Mrs. James Harvey—shall I hear

anything unpleasant here, I wonder? Oh, Mrs. Robert's change, of course!"

She did not look at all apprehensive as she walked swiftly along the drive, ran up the steps, and rang the bell with the assurance and imperiousness peculiar to the expected doctor. The Harveys were, as Dr. Fullagher had said, a clan in themselves. There were four brothers, all married and settled within three miles of the town, and one sister, Mrs. Godwin. All five families were prosperous and well-to-do. Their houses were large and substantial; their style of living quiet, but comfortable in the extreme; and the families of the four brothers were large. Mrs. Godwin had been married only a year, and was expecting her first child. They were Dissenters. They attended the same chapel, and went together in most important respects. If one Harvey thought well to deal at a certain shop, the other Harveys were seldom long in following his example. In the matter of medical advice they were quite as clannish. Dr. Fullagher had attended them from his first coming until about eighteen months ago, when a lucky accident befriended Edith and brought her into notice.

The youngest of the James family, Ethel, a child of four, having one day the felicity to

discover the garden gate unfastened, took advantage of the unusual and gratifying fact, and started on a journey of discovery down the road. She trotted on in infinite content for some yards, her light, scanty locks floating from her delighted face, her baby feet pattering away in blissful freedom. Urged by the spirit of adventure, she crossed the road, and gazed for some entranced moments through the bars of a gate at a number of sheep feeding in a field. Then, in some terror at beholding a horse and carriage coming her way, she turned to re-cross it. Halfway over a noiseless bicycle came close upon her. The rider shouted and swerved, but the child, confused and frightened, hesitated, and, finally, the youth, who was too unskilful a rider to change his course quickly enough, compounded matters by tumbling down. Ethel was sent flying, and was only saved from being run over by Edith, who ran up just in time to snatch her from the approaching carriage.

The youth proved to be one of the William Harveys, and his alarmed recognition of his cousin prevented any difficulty about the little wanderer's home. Edith carried her back to the house, and young Harvey told the story of the accident to his agitated aunt. Little Ethel was insensible, and injured to the extent of some

severe bruises and a sprained wrist. Edith set to work with unmistakable ability, restored her to her senses and made her comfortable, while the mother wondered, and obeyed directions only half-willingly and trustingly. She had sent off for Dr. Fullagher post-haste at once, but in such a distressing emergency she could not refuse the help of this young lady-doctor. She thanked Edith tremulously, still with the same wondering, incredulous expression, blessed her for saving her child's life, and for the help, which her tone betrayed she looked upon merely as a makeshift until the doctor's arrival.

Dr. Fullagher was out of town, however, and only reached the Hollies at ten next morning, when Ethel cried at seeing him, and refused to show him her hurt wrist, saying, she wanted that "booty doctor-lady." The spoilt pet got her own way, too, and Edith was soon in regular attendance at the house. The other Harveys remained aloof only long enough to see that the daring of the "Jameses" brought down no visitation upon their heads, and then came in gallantly one by one to the support of their relatives. Their surrender was perhaps hastened by the old doctor's irritable behaviour during the needful time of doubt. He knew too well that they would follow the leader in this respect

as in all others, and no doubt lent them a helping hand out of sheer contradiction.

Edith fancied this morning that Mrs. James's manner showed a change. Always reserved and cold, she seemed constrained and ill-at-ease. Measles were running their gentle course through the family, and Ethel, now nearly six, was the latest victim. She was feverish and fretful, but could smile at her friend, and cling lovingly to the gentle hand which felt her pulse.

"How do you think she is?" asked the anxious, prosperous mother.

"Decidedly better—oh, she will be quite herself again in a week or so," said Edith, cheerfully. "Won't you, Ethel child?"

Ethel squeezed her hand, and laid her cheek against it before letting it go.

"She has had a very mild attack," observed Edith, turning to the table where the medicine stood.

"Do you think so?" said Mrs. James, in that accent of surprise which is negation. "She was very feverish indeed last night—so feverish that I almost sent for you."

"Night is always the worst time."

Her cheerful tone tried the mother.

"I think you regard the attack too lightly," she murmured, laying an anxious hand on Ethel's

brow, a hand which was jerked off the next moment by a sudden fretful movement.

"I did not see how ill she was last night, of course," said Edith, feeling a hesitation in speaking, on account of this strange new necessity for being politic. "She is certainly much better to-day."

Then she moved to inspect the other invalid, a girl about twelve, who was in the first stage of convalescence. Here, again, her account was hopeful, and she stood thoughtfully by the bed, putting on her gloves, and listening to Mrs. Harvey's slow and detailed account of everything that had been done since her last visit, of every spoonful of nourishment that had been administered, and the exact quantity of sleep each child had enjoyed.

"Aunt Robert has got the new doctor, Miss Romney," observed Maude, the elder girl, breaking in abruptly at the first pause in her mother's account. She had raised herself to a sitting posture, and with hands clasped round her knees and chin resting upon them, was regarding Edith with curious attentiveness. "Have you heard? She says she likes him better than any other doctor she has ever had, and that he is the only one who has understood her case, and that she is sure he'll be a great treasure to her."

"He sha'n't come and see me," screamed Ethel, floundering wildly in her bed. "I'll only have you, Miss Romney. So there!"

Edith smiled and nodded her thanks to her little champion, and Mrs. Harvey hastily said, "Hush, Maude, don't talk any more nonsense."

But she looked flushed and discomposed, and took Edith into the drawing-room in order to make a half-apology.

"You must not mind the children's chatter, Miss Romney. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Robert Harvey, was always fidgety about her health—too fidgety, for she does nothing, and has none of the cares and anxieties I have with my family. She used to feel dissatisfied with Dr. Fullagher, and think a new doctor would do her good."

It was evident that Mrs. James was rather ashamed of Mrs. Robert's hasty defection, but how hopeful a sign such shame might be for her own faithfulness was another question. However, the words, stiff and ungraciously spoken as they were, cheered Edith, and she left the house in better spirits. Her round that morning was a long one. It was past three when she reached home, feeling tired and hungry, and more depressed than those two facts had ever left her before. In almost every house something had been said of Dr. Fane, and the speakers

had shown a wonderful unanimity in condoling with her as if her best days were done.

“It is absurd. Do they *all* intend throwing me over?” she thought with tired impatience as she came out of the last house. “If each means to keep to me as each implies there is surely no need for this doleful tone.”





CHAPTER IX.

WINIFRED MAKES A DISCOVERY.

“And quickly ’gan her heart to beat
As love drew near those eyes to greet,
Who knew him not till that sweet hour.”

Morris.

EDITH said nothing to Winifred about her interview with Mrs. Ardley. She would not distress her child by letting her know that her name had been the subject of such a dispute. Of course, if Mrs. Ardley really carried her threat into execution, it would be necessary to mention the fact of the rupture. Till that happened, the less said the better. As it chanced, Winifred heard of the outcome of the matter sooner than Edith herself.

She and Mona Milward both studied painting at the School of Art, and worked in the same room. Winifred stood at her easel one morning about a fortnight later painting a fruit study in oils—painting with even better success than usual, and with the delicious content of one at

work upon a favourite art. She was absorbed and dreamily happy. Mona sat near, sketching a handful of wild flowers, languidly putting in feeble touches here and there, and idly lounging in her chair for the chief part of the time. The morning was hot, and she was not in the mood for work. The head-master, Mr. Day, dreaded by his pupils for his irritable temper, drew near towards the end of the lesson to inspect their progress. He stopped by Winifred a moment or two, uttered a word of encouragement, and made a few suggestions. She was one of his brightest, and therefore one of his favourite, pupils, and he never lost his temper with her. With Mona, on the contrary, he found a difficulty in keeping it. She rose and gave him her seat, and, while he surveyed her work, talked to the lady behind. Mona was well aware that talking disturbed the artistic nerves, but she persevered, for the disgusted expression on Mr. Day's face, and the ejaculations he was muttering below his breath, warned her that she was already deep in disgrace.

Mr. Day attempted a few corrections, and then despair seized him.

"I should like to know what flower this is intended to be, Miss Milward?" he burst forth, in icy tones of exasperation. "A wild rose, a daisy, or a snowdrop?"

"Which?" asked Mona, bending to look.
 "Oh, that is a generalization of all three."

"And this—this *smudge* is no doubt intended for a generalization of their three leaves?" demanded Mr. Day, in a cold fury. Mona bent her untidy head still lower to see.

"I think it must be," she said, with the calm of innocence. "I had forgotten what it was meant for."

Mr. Day threw down the brush and jumped up.

"It was too hot to paint," Mona explained a few minutes later, as she and Winifred went down the steps together.

"Come to the racecourse with me and get some fresh air," said Winifred.

"The racecourse is only bearable in the evening, when they are playing at cricket. No. I must go into the town. I have to call at Spenser's to ask after the cooking of my last work of genius in the china line." And as they walked slowly up the shady side of the street, she added, "Have you heard of Mrs. Ardley's accident?—the latest trial of temper for that long-suffering husband of hers?"

"No. Nothing serious, I hope?"

"Just short of dangerous," said Mona. "She managed in some way, best known to herself, to tumble over a stool, and cut her forehead against

the sharp corner of some other piece of furniture. I hope her good looks are not irreparably injured, for I am sure," said Mona, assuming a precise drawl, "it would annoy Mr. Ardley very much. In fact, no one who knows them has found courage to walk down Waterloo Street since the occurrence. Mr. Ardley is generally supposed to be ranging at large in that secluded and spotless locality, trying to win some semblance of composure and fortitude under this last heavy dispensation. And people, in the excess of their caution, have sent their most able-bodied servants to make inquiries at The Lodge."

"It is odd Aunt Edith has not mentioned the accident."

"Not at all, my child. She is in all probability as ignorant of the dangerous state of that thoroughfare near the wool-factory, as you were yourself until this moment."

"What do you mean?" asked Winifred, puzzled.

"I'm sorry to shock your faith in human nature," replied Mona, adding wickedly, "especially in Ardley human nature; but when such a terrible accident happened, who could be found strong enough to close the 'gaping' wound, as I once heard an actor pronounce it, but a *man*?"

"You mean Dr. Fane was sent for?" said Winifred.

"That's about the tune of it," to quote an oft-heard phrase of the engaging Joel." She cast a sidelong glance at her friend's serious face, and added pathetically, "I am sorry, Winnie dear."

Winnie could not help laughing. "So am I," she said. "It isn't pleasant news for Aunt Edith."

"No. If you think it will be any comfort to her, you may tell her that *I* will never go over to the enemy."

"Thanks!"

"Ropes sha'n't draw me, however godlike may be his beauty."

They reached the end of the street, where their ways divided. Mona looked rather mischievously at her friend.

"Of course you are prepared to take the blame of Mrs. Ardley's defection upon yourself, when you tell Miss Romney?" she said.

"Blame! What have I to do with it?" cried Winifred.

"You are the innocent cause."

"Surely you are talking nonsense!"

"Not that I am aware of. Do you remember who turned over your music at our last intellectual gathering at the Elms? Well, well," said Mona, as Winifred flushed quickly. "I

won't tease you. But Mrs. Ardley watched with anything but delight, and our mutual friend, Louisa, dropped me a hint, in fashion like unto one of her father's, intimating that she claimed the credit of opening Mrs. Ardley's eyes. You know the silly girl has cast an eye of favour upon the elegant Oxonian—which of course is all nonsense—but Mrs. Ardley being, as some one has happily expressed it, a lineal descendant of the dog in the manger——”

“Oh, Mona! pray say no more!” said Winifred. “It is dreadful nonsense.”

“Then don't give it a thought, my dear,” was the calm rejoinder, and with a lazy gesture of farewell Miss Milward sauntered down the street. Winifred, a little pucker on her fair brow, and a slight flush on her fair cheeks, turned into the Old Walk. This was a road for pedestrians only, which led directly to the racecourse, and was shaded by trees on either side. Behind the trees were oblong strips of gardens, behind the gardens a row of old-fashioned houses. This road was shady and pleasant even on a hot sunny day, and Winifred walked up it at a gentle pace, gravely dwelling on what she had just heard.

Whether the reason Mona advanced for Mrs. Ardley's behaviour was true, or only a flight of her too active fancy, it was quite bad enough

that such a reason should be merely suggested. Winifred had all a delicate girl's shrinking from careless talk on that subject, and it was exceedingly painful to her to have her name lightly coupled with a young man's. It might be only Mona's nonsense, but it had destroyed Winifred's fresh unconsciousness towards Oscar. She had certainly seen a great deal of him since his return from abroad, and she acknowledged with quickened heart-beats, that those last few months had been the pleasantest of her stay in Wanningster—the pleasantest of any time in her life. The private confession, timidly, almost reluctantly, made, startled her at first. It was a serious thing to discover that any stranger had power to make the days so sweet to her. She even made a little struggle against the fact, but soon yielded to its convincing truth. The days were pleasanter when she saw him. It was so—but what did it mean? She had reached the racecourse at this stage in her reflections, and was once more in the glare of sunshine. The heat disturbed her. She wished to think over these strange new thoughts, and she sought a certain seat in a quiet part down by the hedge, which was partly sheltered by a tree. The sky was brilliant and cloudless, the quivering blue too bright to be glanced up into. The sunshine blazed over

everything; burning the withered grass to still scantier brown, cracking the ground, flashing from the gas-lamps and the windows of the houses on the further side of London Road. There were several nursery groups scattered about—babies in their carriages drawn up to the benches, where their nurses sat working or talking, or doing both, as the case might be, and children of tender age playing around. The shrill childish voices floated on the air, and reached Winifred in her quiet retreat, but they only mingled with the distant and fitful bleating of sheep and the occasional roll of wheels along the dusty road, and did not disturb her musings.

A dreamy expression brooded over her face, a dawning smile of sweet surprise and tender happiness shone in the soft depths of her questioning eyes.

What did it mean? she wondered in that delicious musing, and hardly cared to find an answer.

The children played on, now a shriller laugh, now a louder shout, cleaving the sun-quivering air. A young couple sauntered close in front of Winnie's seat—evidently newly engaged, for they both were too foolishly, blissfully absorbed to care who saw them. Winifred's eyes fell on them absently. The smile brightened involuntarily in

her eyes as their felicity forced itself upon her notice. They passed, but it seemed as if they had brought the answer to her question, for Winnie's fair cheeks suddenly turned celestial rosy red, and she instinctively lowered her sunshade. Did it mean—that? She caught her breath in a confusion of wonder, fear, and bliss. She had sometimes thought of the possibilities of love and happiness there might be in her future, with an imaginative girl's romantic awe of what should be inexpressibly beautiful—had the hour for her to enter into those mysteries really come? Love—to be loved again. A lark over the field behind was pouring down its ecstasie song. The rapturous melody fell on her ear just then, and seemed to express for her agitated heart all the incoherent rejoicing and sweet tumult which was overpowering it. She could have covered her face and wept. She listened yearningly to the bird. It was an exquisite relief to have the gladness and rapture trembling in her own bosom given expression to in that unfaltering song of ecstasy.

But ecstasy is short-lived. The lark stopped singing, and Winifred's exaltation of mood was lowered. She began to doubt and question, even to rebuke herself for her thoughts just now—the mere idea of this should not have entered her head until suggested by a word from him

"I wish Mona had said nothing," she said to herself. Mona's words had drawn aside the sweet veil of mystery, and Winifred felt that her friend had usurped another's right. Then again she checked herself and rose from the seat, and began to cross the racecourse, walking slowly and dreamily in this new world "which is the old."

She went to the further end, through the gate, and past the toll-bar. The road was dusty and hot, but she was unconscious of both dust and heat. A swiftly-rolling brougham passed her, and stopped at a large gate a few yards ahead. The carriage could not be Edith's, for it had stopped at The Lodge, as Winifred noticed with a blush. A gentleman got out—tall, dark, a stranger—Dr. Fane, of course. He crossed the causeway, turning to look at her, as people look at each other in the street. This new doctor's glance was quick and searching, and a gleam of interest shot into his keen dark eyes as they fell on the pretty face under the shady hat. Some trees in the Ardleys' garden cast a grateful shadow over the footpath, and the picture of the slight girl in her fresh linen dress coming through the chequered sunshine and shade was attractive enough to please the most critical eyes. The new doctor disappeared within the gate, and

Winifred walked on, rather sore at heart. Dear, darling Aunt Edie, it was too bad, was her first thought, and then a cold shadow fell upon her. Would *he* turn against them too? Would this change bring their acquaintance to an end?

"Good morning, Miss Noel," said Oscar, from horseback in the road close beside her. He had sprung to the ground next moment, and was shaking hands. "I was obliged to call out," he said, laughing. "You were so deep in thought."

Winifred's hand was in his, and she looked up at him with a shy confusion meeting him had never caused before. He, at least, was quite the same. He looked glad to meet her, and with his horse's bridle in his hand, turned back to walk beside her. He talked of the heat, wondered she was out, apologized for not having called during the last fortnight—"I ought to have inquired if the dinner-party had had injurious effects upon you!" and explained that he had been away from home.

"I'm going to be good now—don't look surprised, Miss Noel. I am going to settle down to business, be a model of steadiness and hard work, and the comfort of my father's declining years. I mean to amass a large fortune, build a mansion on the model of The Elms, stock the grounds with peacocks, be made mayor, and be

universally respected and adored. There's a brilliant picture! Won't you say something to encourage me?"

"It is a noble ambition, and," she added, with this new shyness which puzzled Oscar, "your father will be glad."

"Yes," went on Oscar, "I am going to settle down. In preparation for which steadying process, I have just taken my last fling of freedom. I have just come from the continent. In honour of the untrammelled days of my adolescence I crossed the Channel and paid a hasty pilgrimage to some of the haunts dear to me then. The visits were very affecting," with a touch of ironical bitterness. "Had I possessed a poet's pen I would have brought back a volume of sonnets as proof."

"The world has certainly lost," said Winifred, gravely.

"And so have I," he exclaimed, with a short laugh. "But it was something I wished very much to lose." He threw back his head with some defiance as well as triumph.

"Then I suppose I may congratulate you," said Winnie, quite in the dark as to the meaning of this riddle.

He turned to her quickly. "Don't you think it is matter for congratulation when a man

succeeds at last in throwing off an influence that has fettered him night and day—vexing, torturing, tantalizing him—making quiet, steady work an impossibility—why, it is like throwing off the delirium of fever, and waking up cool and calm to health and one's right mind."

"Oh, I do not understand," faltered Winnie, a sick flutter at her heart. "But I thought," she added, forcing a smile, "I thought you were about to give up freedom and assume the yoke of business—this sounds as if you had gained freedom."

"So I have," he said quickly. "So I have. And the first moments are so exhilarating that one can't help a little craziness. I am so glad I met you this morning. You are the only person to whom I could tell my good news."

Winifred raised her soft eyes with a shy look of questioning wonder. Her heart gave a spring, and the colour came into her face, making her eyelids droop once more.

She was saved from the necessity of answering by the sudden stopping of a brougham a yard or two ahead. The door was opened, and Edith leaned out. Winifred welcomed the interruption as a relief. The consciousness she felt in Oscar's society embarrassed and confused her;

she wanted time to get used to her discovered feelings. She went eagerly forward, therefore.

Miss Romney's face was grave. She bowed rather stiffly to young Ardley.

"Good morning, Mr. Ardley. It is getting so hot, Winnie, I think you had better drive home. You look tired."

"It is hot," said Winifred. She shook hands with Oscar, and got into the carriage.

The spectacle of the young people walking together had been rather a disagreeable shock to Edith. Winnie was too precious for that sort of thing. But she would not say a word about it.

"Mrs. Ardley has had an accident—a very slight one—and has called in Dr. Fane," said Winifred, as they were borne swiftly townwards. "Mona told me."

"Ah," said Edith, leaning back and looking out, "I quite expected her defection."





CHAPTER X.

THE NEW DOCTOR.

“Ce n'est pas le zèle qui est récompensé—c'est le savoir-faire.”

BARON WESENBERG.

“In short, I firmly du believe
In Humbug generally,
Fer it's a thing thet I perceive
To hev a solid vally.”—*The Biglow Papers.*

THE loss of money is a strong and compelling force. Fane had acknowledged ruefully a certain wisdom in those remarks of Dr. Fullagher concerning his age, and the advisability of beginning the practical part of his medical career; a man could not spend his days roaming—at least, custom is against it. Englishmen in the middle-classes are expected to work, and Fane was by no means one of conventionality's emancipated slaves—but it was the argument of a lessened income which brought the hazy indefiniteness of a “settling down” “some day” to the present. He had always intended to practise, of course, still the vague intention of a man whose means

prevent the pressure of an imperative obligation to work, puts no term to the years of wandering and pleasure-seeking. The monotonous routine of the professional man, whose practice depends upon the sedateness and heavy dullness of conduct generally characterized as respectable, galled him merely in idea. Penniless men might tame themselves to the inanity required by exacting hypochondriacs, he would put off the evil day as long as possible. The arrival of that evil day was notified unmistakably by the sudden loss of a third of his income. The routine of earning a living might be burdensome, but he had no notion of spending his days in the restrictive exercise of cutting his coat (that is, his travels and amusements) according to an insufficient quantity of material.

It is remarkable how sometimes the important steps of a man's life are taken with scarcely any consideration. The most trivial circumstance will bias his decision. There were larger towns, and richer towns, and towns decidedly more important in every way than Wanningster. Fane gave the others scarcely a thought. He was aware of those generalities, and might have remembered particular facts in favour of some particular town had he chosen to think of it, but he took no trouble over the weighing of pros and

cons. The acquaintance he had already with Wanninger, and, perhaps, the whimsical service his old friend desired from him, put that town into his head. It promised, too, a curious element of interest—there would be a spice of amusement in measuring his powers (backed up by the vast powers of prejudice and tradition) against those of the lady-doctor, who, with the aid of the fictitious attractions of novelty and so-called advancement, had conquered all before her.

On the subject of women's position Fane held opinions of the severest orthodoxy. Like many strong, vigorous characters, who do not know the feeling of dependence, he preferred to be depended upon—he would not think of exacting sympathy or intelligent interest in his concerns from a woman. The more helpless, the more utterly dependent a woman was, the nearer she approached the feminine ideal. His theory was the general one, that every woman should marry, and that no woman should earn her living: the latter part of which theory has been practised, as consistently as it is possible to practise an ideal theory in an imperfect state of civilization, by the simple expedient of masculine monopoly—the obstinacy of statistics which prevented the carrying out of the first part was to be regretted,

and the surplus and unnecessary women could only be tolerated with the half-pity, half-contempt, given to ambitious failures. The woman, however, who teaches or follows one of the time-approved and badly-paid occupations, almost wins a place in the ranks of feminine excellence, compared with the one who daringly strikes into a path kept sacred to masculine feet until lately. The idea of such a one was hateful to Fane's mind. Her daring called for immediate chastisement; her triumphs ought to be re-triumphed over; her success atoned for by complete and humiliating defeat.

But, although some fantastic caprice led him to set up in Wanningster, he was too much a man of the world not to act as if the driest dictates of reason prompted him. He intended to make the largest and richest practice in the town, and he set about it in a very business-like fashion. He discarded rough grey suits as a Bohemianism irreconcilable with professional dignity. He rented a house the very counterpart of Dr. Fullagher's—as irreproachable in ugliness, squareness, dinginess, and respectability. He furnished it, that is to say the public part of it, with corresponding severity. He hired a smart-looking lad to act as page, and clothed him magnificently in shining buttons. He bought a

brougham before the first patient's ring awoke the echoes in his domains, and the harness, in which purchase he allowed himself the pleasure of following his own taste, would have drawn tears from Dr. Fullagher's eyes had envy been his failing. As it was the old doctor applauded.

"You have taken the measure of the many-headed," he remarked approvingly. "Good. very good. You will not have to wait long." And the doctor congratulated himself on the far-seeing wisdom here displayed by him when Mrs. Robert Harvey's summons came.

"About as good a take as you could make for the first," he said, when Fane showed him her note. "There are five families, and as clannish a set as ever lived out of Scotland. Mrs. Robert has shown the rest of them the way through the hedge and the whole flock will follow."

He kindly added a short dissertation on Mrs. Harvey's peculiarities in order to smooth the way for Fane's management of her. His remarks were not calculated to encourage undue confidence. She was described briefly as a fool, and starting from this as the argument, the doctor proceeded to its amplification.

"She is the most uninteresting person of my acquaintance," he said. "Not that I have any fault to find with her behaviour to me; on the

contrary, it was almost too flattering. Had I chosen to spend the morning talking about her health, and sympathising with her fancied sufferings — she has a cormorant's appetite for sympathy—I should always have been welcome, and encouraged to come again and do likewise. No, I have nothing to complain of. But she is positively devoid of attractions. Now Miss Jacques, my old enemy, whose tongue is as a two-edged sword, was amusing. She has made me laugh, and one owes something to the person who has done that. She could make you forget you had called professionally, but Mrs. Harvey never made you forget your profession, and, what was a great deal worse, she never allowed you to forget her. Her family is grown up. She lives in a God-forsaken country locality about three miles out of town. She does nothing except a little fancy-work on what she pathetically describes her 'good days,' and I firmly believe she would forget to wake up some rainy morning were it not that the spark of life is kept alight by the interest she takes in her health. That fact shows how important her doctor's visits are. I found the pessimist view of her condition soothed her best, so I made a point of looking particularly solemn when she detailed her supposed symptoms, with lack-lustre

eyes fixed upon my face, and in a tone of voice which expressed, 'There, doctor, what can you make of that?' Poor woman, it is her delusion that her case is unique, and that the particulars of it would open a vast field of research to the faculty, whereas all that ails her is greed—greed and its companion, indolence. Many's the time I've been tempted to tell her so frankly. From her hastily throwing over Penthesilea (this was the doctor's name for Miss Romney) I dare say she has received the truth at the hands of the Amazon. She is sure to be one of your brusque, downright women, who take a delight in plain speaking, or she wouldn't be what she is. Women know no medium—either they wheedle and lie, or they pride themselves upon their brutal frankness. Miss Romney, being strong-minded, will of course follow the latter course, and will naturally have scant patience with the delusions and limpness of my honoured, quondam patient—being of her own sex."

Fane found himself well prepared by these remarks to grapple, as his friend expressed it, with a fine case of fatuous folly. Mrs. Robert Harvey was what the doctor had described her. The chief event of her monotonous, self-indulgent life was her doctor's call, the divisions of the day, her meals and mixtures.

Edith had taken her case seriously and conscientiously, as she took all her cases, for, in the simplicity of her unworldliness, the improved health of her patients was her chief consideration, not the stroking of them into a complacent certainty of their own importance. She had earnestly insisted on reforms in diet and exercise, little dreaming how unpalatable the advice was, and how gradually and surely it was offending her patient. Instead of listening with tender commiseration to the abundant details of the sufferer's last "miserable" meal, and suggesting some fresh delicacy which might be supposed to tempt a capricious appetite, she had more than once exclaimed in honest dismay, and had ruthlessly forbidden at least half the dishes Mrs. Harvey had "touched." Even "touching" was forbidden in regard to so many that the good lady grew apprehensive of starvation.

"For you know I must have nice dainty things," she said, as she made a pathetic recital of her wrongs to the new handsome doctor, whose grave, deferential, sympathetic manner was "just what she liked in a medical man," and whose quick little frowns and slight liftings of the brow as he listened implied such disapproval of Miss Romney's treatment as soothed,

and, at the same time, stimulated Mrs. Harvey's remembrance of her sufferings under it.

"Of course," said Dr. Fane, gently.

"I can't eat plain common fare," she said, still more plaintively; "such as a mutton chop, for instance."

"No, no," soothingly. "A fanciful appetite needs coaxing."

Mrs. Harvey sighed in happy mournfulness. The new doctor had great insight. Fane managed so well, in short, that he left Mrs. Harvey convinced she had at length found a doctor who understood her case. He solved the vexed question of exercise by suggesting a stroll in the garden on fine days—Mrs. Robert leaning on her maid's arm; this pomp of invalidism he shrewdly imagined would take her fancy. And a skilful hint to the effect that her sufferings were nervous (in the sense of fanciful) put the finishing touch to the good impression he made. Nerves are always refined. It was sweet to Mrs. Harvey to hear that her indisposition was to be set down to nerves, after languishing under the gross suspicion of its being caused by something so very different.

Fane had been nearly a month in Wanningster, when one morning he looked in next door and showed his friend a letter.

“Read that,” said he, and Dr. Fullagher read as follows :

“MY DEAR AUSTIN,

“It has suddenly struck me that bachelors in your position—‘setting-up’ is the proper expression, isn’t it?—are generally supposed to need a housekeeper. I beg to offer my services to you in that capacity. It is true I have no experience, but from what I have seen of experienced people, I venture to think my lack of it ought to be a greater recommendation than otherwise. At least, I have the merit of not being wedded to ‘ways,’ and shall be, therefore, as tractable as a lamb. To be brief, I want to come and pay you a long visit—until I grow tired of the fun. Aunt Fane is not in the best of moods just now—we have had a small difference of opinion. She wants me to go to Brighton with her, too, and I feel as if Brighton would be insufferable. I know the place by heart. I want a *real* change. I should like to join you in your struggles to get a practice. I would keep house at the lowest possible rate, and learn cooking, and be a domestic treasure. After all, if worth got its due, I believe that is the character I am most fitted to shine in. I will buy every book on household management and ‘Things a lady ought to know,’ and every cookery book I can lay my hands on, and study them devotedly. So write at once and give me as warm and pressing an invitation as you can phrase. I want the fun.

“Yours in confident expectation,

“SIBYL.”

“P.S. If you do act as a brother in this matter, I will lay in a stock of kitchen aprons at once. And shall I bring any kettles or saucepans? I fancy a cook who knows her business uses about a hundred.”

"Dear me," said the doctor, after carefully reading this epistle. "It's very kind of her, I'm sure."

Austin said "Very," and laughed.

"Most amiable. It is not every girl who would give up the pleasures of London and Brighton to settle down in a dull provincial town and keep house for a brother. She seems lively, too."

"She is. I'm glad she is coming on that account. But as for "settling down"—well, wait till you see her. I expect this caprice of hers is to annoy some unhappy devil who has been rash enough to be bewitched by her. She has always some two or three at her chariot-wheels."

"Are you fond of her?"

"Yes. Very fond. She is charming—quite my idea of what a woman ought to be; and if I met one like her, I should delight in taming her and winning her. I would make her content with one man's love and admiration."

"This sounds as though the young lady flirted."

"You will see for yourself—as far as you can see in this town."

"Wanningster will be rather too limited a stage, I fear, for me to judge satisfactorily of her powers."

“Oh, I don’t know. She doesn’t exert herself, you know.”

“I suppose you will give her the warm invitation?” said the doctor slowly.

“Oh, of course. It will be delightful to have her.”

“Do you think it right to encourage her rebellion against her aged relative?” hazarded Fullagher, hesitatingly.

This unusual strictness amused his friend.

“You should see my aunt, you would not think of calling her aged so pathetically then. If Sibyl likes to rebel, I don’t see why I should hinder her. Don’t be afraid, doctor, you will be charmed with her.”

About that the doctor had his own opinion, which politeness required him to withhold. He could only shudder at the suggestion of his being charmed with a young and fashionable London lady. While making a valiant effort, he said—“Pray write and summon her at once. I long to make her acquaintance.” And as he drank his second cup of coffee he thought with rueful penitence—“It is to be hoped the recording angel sets down polite fictions under the head of excusable—they *ought* to be put to our credit as penances for wrong-doing.”

Fane wrote, asking his sister to come as soon

as she liked, and Sibyl replied at once, fixing the date three days later.

A day before the one appointed, at about half-past ten, a cab piled with luggage stopped before Dr. Fane's door. A tall young lady got out, gave some money to the cabman—satisfactory payment, to judge from his radiant expression and hearty "Thank you, ma'am"—and addressed the amazed page in clear, cheerful tones.

"Dr. Fane at home? Yes? What room is he in?" Walter feebly pointed to the breakfast-room door, and was going towards it, but the intruder waved him aside with a "No, never mind—see to the luggage," and walked straight into the room.

Austin sat at the table, eating his breakfast, and reading the paper.

"Good morning, Austin."

"Why, Sibyl!"

He sprang up and kissed her, and held her, laughing. "Do you call this 'Saturday'?"

"I came sooner than I intended," said Sibyl. "Aunt's reproaches were too much for me—even for me, patient and long-suffering niece that I am. We had a grand scene last night, and I decided to come off at once. I like doing things in a hurry."

"So it seems. You must have got up very early."

“Earlier than you, judging by appearances,” as she glanced at the table. “Wanningster keeps more fashionable hours than I was prepared for. I had no idea I should arrive at your breakfast time—this *is* breakfast, I suppose?”

“I was called out at seven this morning,” said Fane, “and of course at that unearthly hour there was no possibility of getting a cup of coffee. I have just got back.”

“Who would be a doctor!” exclaimed Sibyl. “But your servants ought to have had the kettle boiling at that hour.”

“Well, they hadn’t. They are not yet equal to sudden demands upon them. Won’t you join me? you ought to be ready for some refreshment after your early rising and travelling.”

“I am not hungry; but I should like a cup of coffee, since you are so hospitably pressing.”

Austin rang the bell.

“Your luggage seems to be still coming in,” he remarked, as the sound of a heavy tin trunk being deposited upon the hall floor came to his ears. “I’m afraid you have brought more than a hundred saucepans.”

“No; it’s all personal property. I must have plenty of things for a very very long visit. It isn’t all on the cab—I left two boxes at the station to be sent after.”

Walter presented himself, and received an order for fresh coffee.

"I hope there is enough stowage-room in the house," observed Fane, going on with his breakfast.

Sibyl had thrown herself into his easy-chair, and her quick, observant eyes were roaming over the room and its appointments. She laughed at her brother's speech. "From what I have seen of the style and size of the house I should say there was abundanee of room for two people—in our position," she added.

"Describe it."

"With pleasure. You are the poor doetor just starting, and you must, even when backed up by a small private income, be careful and economical; and I am the devoted sister who helps her brother by eareful housekeeping and that sort of thing."

Fane laughed somewhat sardonically. It was a pretty play no doubt for Miss Sibyl, seeing that it was literally a play—exeept his part of it. She had money of her own, and knew nothing whatever of earefulness and economy.

"It's a picturesque position," he said, with a dryness of tone natural to a man who has "had losses," "and, fortunately, no real anxiety will prevent your enjoying it."

“I intend to enjoy it immensely. The change will be so thorough and delightful. Wait ; you shall see how perfectly I will act the part. You will allow me so much a week for housekeeping ; I shall keep accounts and spend only what you can afford, and I have brought some charming costumes in which to do housework.”

“I have no doubt you will enjoy the fun for a while.”

“I am sure I shall,” she said, brightly. “I quite look forward to my new character. It will be delightful to be obliged to live carefully, and to try and screw as much out of a sovereign as one can. There must be a feeling of achievement and ingenuity in making both ends meet, as the phrase goes, when there is some difficulty. Poor people must feel they are cleverer and keener-witted than their rich neighbours who have only to order what they like.”

“I don’t think poor people would object to exchange their sharper brains for fuller purses.”

“Perhaps not. I suppose they get tired of the same things as most of us do.”

“Am I to set down the honour of your visit to such a discontent on your part ?” asked Fane, looking at her amused, and a little curious.

She was a pretty creature—tall, slender, and upright in figure, with golden hair of a bright, glittering colour, clear, well-opened grey eyes, lips “fresh as the wilding hedge-rose-cup,” and an exceedingly beautiful complexion. Those were her chief charms. Taken strictly, her face was not beautiful, but the expression was so arch and charming, the colouring so vivid and pure, the turn of head so graceful, and the eyes so clear and frank, that she gave an impression of more brilliant beauty than some women to whom the epithet beautiful might be justly applied.

At her brother's question she swept her long lashes upward, and gave him a calm, smiling glance.

“That,” she said, serenely, “would be telling.”

“Ah, I see,” he replied, “the question is indiscreet.”

The page brought in fresh coffee, and retired, casting undisguised glances of wonder and curiosity at the fair, bright-faced new-comer.

Fane poured out a cup and took it to his sister.

“Here is your coffee,” he said, “but I can't honestly recommend it. My cook, who rejoices in the name of Kezia Grubb, regards the making of coffee as too hopelessly among the lost arts to make any effort to regain it.”

“A woman with that name is not likely to

know how to make anything. She must be taught, and if she can't learn she must go," said Sibyl, with the autocratic severity of inexperience. "But now tell me about your practice—you are partner with another man, are you not?"

"Dr. Fullagher, next door. I must bring him in to see you to-day. Partner," said Fane, "well no, not that—his successor. He has retired, and I have bought the good-will of his practice—or, more correctly speaking, what should be his practice."

"This sounds mysterious. Has he lost his practice?"

"Not entirely, but by far the greater part. There is a lady-doctor here, and people have gone a little mad over her."

"A lady-doctor? how delightful!"

"Very delightful!"

"Why this venomous tone, dear boy? Do you object to her?"

"Most decidedly; and especially to her spoiling Fullagher's practice for him."

"Every man for himself, you know."

"Yes; but this is a woman," said Austin, drily.

"Austin," said Sibyl, regarding him solemnly, "are you *so* narrow-minded? Why shouldn't she make a good living if she can? She might

just as reasonably, and more reasonably, I think, complain about your setting up after her and trying to ruin her."

"I hope it will not be long before she has reason to complain."

"I see—it is to be war to the knife. Then, of course, I must be on your side, and so good-bye to any hope of getting acquainted with a lady-doctor."

"There can be no question of your being acquainted with such a woman if you live with me," said her brother.

"I renounce the possible pleasure gracefully. Perhaps she would not be nice."

Fane made a grimace of disgust.

"Has she a firm hold in the town?" asked Sibyl.

"That is not an easy question to answer," said Fane, leaning back in his chair and speaking with deliberation. "Wanningster has a character of its own, and it is not quite safe to predict what its behaviour will be. Miss Romney has got at present a good practice and amongst the best people, but whether her hold is firm is quite another thing."

"Do you think it is?"

"Frankly, no. I am newer than Miss Romney, and I believe the people will come to me."

"But if novelty is the chief recommendation a doctor possesses in their eyes, what is to hinder their deserting you in turn?"

Fane looked across at her and smiled.

"I think I shall be able to manage them better than that," said he. "A certain amount of humbug is necessary in dealing with men and women if you want to get on, and from one or two things I have heard and observed it seems pretty evident to me that Miss Romney has none."

"Humbug!" Sibyl's tone expressed horror. "Austin, I am ashamed of you."

"Very well, Sibyl dear."

"But it sounds—vulgar."

"There are different kinds, remember; humbug is not necessarily vulgar. However, to please your fastidious taste, I will call it business tact."

"Ah yes, that sounds much better."

Austin had finished his breakfast, and left the table. Sibyl sprang up.

"Now come and show me the house," she exclaimed. "I long to see my new home."

"Home!" said he, scoffingly. "For how long, I wonder?"

"Never mind that *yet*. What you are to do at present is to act as showman. This is the

dining-room, I suppose?" looking round critically. "Yes, it is a good room of its kind, and it has the advantage of not having its walls enriched with old family portraits."

They went out into the hall. Sibyl just glanced into the consulting-room and surgery.

"They look severely professional to my ignorant eyes," she remarked. "Of course, feminine interference in these sacred chambers is out of the question, but still I think I will venture to drape those curtains more gracefully, and to add an ornament or two to the mantelpiece. Now for the drawing-room."

"It is not furnished yet," said Fane, leading her across to it.

"So much the better," said Sibyl. "I shall have free scope for my energies here."

The room was long, with a bay-window looking into the garden at the back, and satisfied Miss Fane; for, as she approvingly said, it possessed good capabilities. She talked energetically of the furniture it would need and the various adornments. The garden, too, which at the present moment showed the luxuriance of a two years' crop of weeds, must be laid out and stocked. Fane listened to her suggestions, and at last said meekly, "You forget, Sibyl dear, that we are poor."

"We must have the necessaries of life, however poor we are," she exclaimed.

"I feel easier in my mind. I see that your sense of the claims of economy will not often condemn me to cold mutton and suet dumplings."

"Are those the proper dishes for people in our position?" she said, looking thoughtful; and then added, "I think we will not be *quite* as poor as that."

Their inspection of the house was interrupted by the arrival of a note for Fane, marked in obtrusive blackness, "Immediate." Fane laughed as he read it.

"How Fullagher will crow!" he exclaimed.

"Is it a new patient?" asked his sister.

"Nearer half-a-dozen. It is a message from the leading school in the town—Miss Harrison's. What makes it particularly charming is the fact that Miss Harrison is a devout believer in women's rights, and welcomed the lady-doctor effusively as a great champion. Her desertion will be a severe blow to the great champion."

"Are you going at once?"

"Promptness is necessary to the young beginner," said Fane, with becoming gravity. "I hope by punctual and strict attention to orders to merit the public's custom. How does that sound?"

“Odious! I believe this Dr. Fullagher has had a most baleful influence over you.”

“Don’t blame him. It is the lady-doctor’s fault. Well, I must leave you, Sibyl dear—but I shall not be long. Make yourself as comfortable as circumstances will allow, and don’t grow lachrymose over the abundant evidences of our poverty. If patients continue to come to me with this flattering alacrity, I hope to be able in a few years’ time to make up all deficiencies. Don’t break down if you find the larder empty—my credit is still good with the tradesmen. I’m engaged to dine with Fullagher, and as he’s a generous-hearted man, I’ve no doubt that if our destitution is hinted at he will extend his hospitality to you.”

He set out for Miss Harrison’s, leaving Sibyl to her own devices. She went up-stairs and explored the bed-rooms, and then finding her own by the array of luggage which the servants had carefully placed with an eye to its full display, she refreshed herself by making her toilet, and changing her travelling costume for a morning dress of white. That done, she was proceeding with the consciously-virtuous and unusual task of doing her own unpacking, when the blue sky and sunshine beguiled her forth, and she ran down-stairs, and out into the neglected garden.



CHAPTER XI.

THE DOCTOR AT HOME.

IN the course of her explorations she came to a small door in the wall, its original green colour now harmonized by weather and dust to a dull begrimed grey. Ivy hung thickly over the top; the latch was rusty. After some difficulty she succeeded in raising the latch and opening the door, and then stepped over the threshold, expecting another part of the untidy wilderness behind her. But that first step taken, she stopped short. A well-cared for and exquisitely-brilliant garden opened before her astonished eyes. The effect of soft colour was beautiful. The first glance showed her that there were peculiarities in this garden. The walls bounding it were covered with ivy and creeping plants; here and there throve a large Virginian creeper, promising a splendid glow of autumnal colour later, while climbing roses, honeysuckle, jessamine, and the bright canary creeper, luxuriantly enriched the sober framework of dark old ivy. Beds, bordered with

box and divided into circles of colour, skirted the walls, each circle containing flowers of one colour. At the foot of the garden was a pond, with fancy ducks swimming on its smooth surface. Above the pond was a trim little lawn and in the centre of the lawn stood an erection which at first sight suggested a summer-house, and on a second glance puzzled Sibyl, for it was unlike any summer-house she had ever seen—it looked like the flower-decked framework of a gipsy tent. The poles supporting the roof were wreathed with climbing roses and honeysuckle, and the roof itself presented the appearance of a cluster of dovecotes.

Sibyl's quick eyes took in these details, but she was too distracted by the number of pigeons to study them carefully. The amount of bird life seemed little less than wonderful. Not only were fancy ducks disporting themselves on the water or sleeping near its edge, but pigeons seemed everywhere. They walked upon the smooth-shaven lawn around their pretty sleeping place, flew in and out among the flowers, picked up food from the gravel below, and perched upon the duck house. The garden, the flowers, and the pigeons with the glancing rainbow tints, were so lovely, that Sibyl came forward a step in delight, quite forgetting the conviction, which

had flashed upon her with the first glance, that she was wandering from her brother's domains into a stranger's. Her step crunched the gravel.

"Avaunt, Jackson!" said a deep, pleasant voice. "Leave me in peace. You aren't wanted, you confounded idiot."

Sibyl turned her head to the right, whence this gentle utterance proceeded. For a moment she saw no one, and the next caught sight of a large figure behind the wires of one of the aviaries, for the back of the house seemed to develop curiously into large bird houses. The figure, tall, and stout, and gorgeously attired in crimson and gold, stood with its back to her. This must be Dr. Fullagher. She turned quickly to retire. The movement startled some half-dozen pigeons who had settled themselves on the top of the open door to watch the intruder. They wheeled across to the opposite side. The flutter of their flight attracted the doctor. He faced round, looked after his pets, and then at Sibyl. His first impulse, anger at the discomposure of his pets, made him speak hastily. "Don't come any further! you'll frighten the birds! They aren't used to women—never see 'em. No women allowed!"

Sibyl laughed with irrepressible amusement,

and made a deep curtsey and a gesture of alarmed deprecation.

"Why, bless my soul!" exclaimed the doctor, staring at her. He cautiously left the aviary and paused on the gravel just outside, his eyes fixed on the unusual sight. "Where have you come from?—how on earth— Shut the door, for heaven's sake!" he cried, impetuously, as an enterprising pigeon walked inquisitively near it. "I don't want my creatures to learn the way into that howling wilderness."

Sibyl obeyed his vehement gesture. She kept her hand on the latch in hesitating embarrassment, anxious to apologise and explain, and yet hardly knowing how to do so, for it was as much as she could do to keep from laughing at the oriental individual before her, who was regarding her with such frank perplexity. Should she retire, and leave her brother to explain and to introduce her properly? The position was most absurd. Here she was in this remarkable ogre's den, or aviary! with her hand on the closed door, arrested by his amazed eyes.

"Bless my soul!" repeated Dr. Fullagher slowly, bewildered and dazzled by the apparition before him—the slender figure in its white dress, the fair arch face, the laughing eyes and glitter-

ing hair. "You look amused too," added he. Then his eye fell on the door and a bit of the next house, and intelligence flashed into it. "Why—why—you must be Fane's sister." He seized his cap, a gorgeous crimson one with a long golden tassel, which had caught Sibyl's admiring eyes at once, and took it off, still regarding her with puzzled inspection. His perplexity was so great that he forgot to replace the cap. Raising his hand to gain what help was possible from stroking his beard, he became conscious that the hand was already occupied. He looked and saw the cap. A change came over his face—it might almost be said he blushed. He abruptly pushed forward a rustic chair.

"Sit down—pray sit down. Excuse me for a moment," he said, hurriedly, and as hurriedly disappeared into the house.

Sibyl sat down, great enjoyment sparkling in her eyes. She had fallen into the hands of a character, and she looked forward with amusement to the behaviour of this eccentric individual. Why had he vanished so suddenly?—and what would he say or do when he returned?

"No women allowed!" she repeated, laughing lightly. "So he is a woman-hater!—what a shock my appearance must have given him!"

Had she felt alarm instead of curiosity and amused expectation, now was her chance of escape. But Sibyl, the admired, the sought-after, could fear no ungraciousness from any man. Besides, she was anxious to explain her intrusion. She looked round while she waited, full of delight and admiration. The garden was a bower of beauty. Slight as was her knowledge on such matters, she was struck by the apparent perfection of the accommodation provided for the birds.

She was watching the canaries and linnets and finches, their almost ceaseless movement, and listening to their happy singing, when the doctor came out again. The first glance at him explained his abrupt withdrawal ten minutes ago. The oriental magnificence and ease of costume were gone ; he appeared before her in the strictest professional attire. Sibyl regretted that his sense of propriety had forbidden the cap, silk hats not being picturesque, and the cap with its graceful tassel having given a rakish air to his appearance. She had no time, however, for more than a momentary lamentation for its loss.

The doctor's manners had undergone as complete a transformation as his dress—he was dignified, courteous, almost bland. He lifted his hat and made quite a low bow.

“Good morning, Miss Fane. I am rejoiced to welcome you to Wanningster. You must pardon my rudeness just now—I was taken by surprise.”

“It is I who should apologise,” exclaimed Sibyl. “I don’t know what you must think of me! I was exploring my brother’s garden—I had no idea I was walking into a stranger’s—I thought that door belonged to Austin.”

“Just so. And you came through it. I understand,” said the doctor, with a nod, and added languidly, “I am not one of those who credit women with angelic attributes—er—not even wings.”

“Why angelic?” said Sibyl, gravely serene. “Birds have wings.”

Fullagher caressed his beard and examined her thoughtfully. “Ah—true—” he replied. He then proceeded to do the honours of his domain, and, first of all, drew her attention to the aviaries. He pointed out several of his favourite birds, and mentioned the peculiar attraction of each, whether colour, form, or note, carefully refraining from enthusiasm. He did not show too much, nor did he claim raptures for what he did show. This moderation was caused partly by a caustic contempt for the pride of possession and the follies its undue

exercise will sometimes lead men into, and partly by the natural curiosity he felt regarding the formidable visitor an unkind fate had so unexpectedly thrown on his hands. While Sibyl looked at the birds, he inspected her from under his shaggy brows. The prospect of the arrival of Fane's sister had not been pleasant to the doctor. The society of a young lady would mar the present happy state of things; for, as far as he was concerned, it was very happy. Fane's taking up his abode next door had provided him with a congenial companion, a boon, new, and peculiarly and keenly acceptable to the doctor. The sardonic amusement he derived from observation of his neighbours had of necessity been unshared and unappreciated by them. Miss Jacques, it is true, made a bright exception, and her sympathy had more than once caused movements of manly gratitude in his breast, but her powers of adding to his daily happiness were, for obvious reasons, only limited. No limitation stood in Fane's way. The doctor asked nothing better than that his friend should dine with him every evening, and had he obtained his wish Kezia would have been demoralised by the enjoyment of a sinecure. As it was, but few opportunities were hers in which to practise the noble art of cookery.

With his usual force and modesty the doctor had represented the absurdity of Fane's sitting down alone, and risking the chances of Kezia's unequal efforts, when only next door there awaited him pleasant society, and a repast which was, to say the least of it, fit for civilised Christians.

“My household,” said he, “is now in a state of perfection. Everything goes with the smoothness and precision of clockwork, now there are no confounded patients to interfere with a man's digestion. But, mark you, such perfection of comfort is only the result of care and growth—the make-up we fogies have against the hopes and dreams of insolent youngsters. Now David, my cook, has been with me seventeen years, and I have taught him all he knows; he is a creature of my own training, and he does me credit. Samuel has been with me nearly as long, and is a model footman and housemaid. For some years I looked after them with a lynx eye, but now all my house-keeping cares are over. I can trust everything to those two. I have earned my freedom, though; it wasn't one year's work, no, nor five. I have no patience with the complaints of mistresses and their constant changes. I always feel inclined to ask those women who are in

constant hot water with their servants how much teaching they give them. The girls are passed on from one incapable to another, and acquire no good habits. Given honesty, cleanliness, and a fair amount of strength, and you can make your servant, say I—only you must be prepared for patience and long-suffering, as in everything worth getting. But, soft! I must not forget that I have put my theory into practice only with rational creatures—I have dealt with men-servants, not maid-servants. It is possible,—most probable, I should say,—that the female domestic is hopeless, allowing always for rare exceptions. This, however, is beside the mark,” added the doctor, pulling himself up. “What I intended to say when I started was this—it is the duty of every sensible man to shirk as many disagreeables as he can. Why should you have the nuisance of ill-cooked dinners while your household is undergoing the agitating process of settling down. when you can come in here? I’m not disinterested—good Lord, no!—did you ever find a man that was? But now you *are* in the place, now I have tasted the pleasure of intelligent companionship, I feel confoundedly moped when I am left to spend the evening alone.”

It was therefore a sad hour for Dr. Fullagher

when he heard that his friend's sister was coming. A man could not dine out every evening with a sister to look after. And her presence promised an end to the delicious freedom of their intercourse in other ways. What rational pleasure could the doctor find in calling upon his friend when he ran the danger of seeing a young lady—a young lady from London, too, a fashionable young lady? He quailed at the mere idea.

The dreaded sister had come, and what was more, had invaded that part of his kingdom hitherto kept sacred from feminine intrusion. Yet the doctor felt no prostrating shock. Whether the greatness of the emergency called forth his courage, or whether Sibyl proved less formidable than he had expected, it would perhaps be rash to say. He introduced his pets and stood by, casting quietly-scrutinizing glances at her. Her appearance was an agreeable disappointment. The slender figure in white, the bright fair face with its bewitching smile, the frank grey eyes, the lovely complexion, these gratified his beauty-loving eye, while the sweet southern voice, and low, light laugh pleased his ear. But good looks alone were not enough to satisfy him. A pretty fool was his aversion—the prettiness won no mercy for the folly;

beauty marred by affectation failed to win his favour. There was a perfection of manner in Sibyl quite incompatible with affectation, she was simple and gay ; and the doctor, after two or three remarks in his own style, put forth as feelers, so to speak, which were not received by the Chutterworth blank stare or giggle, nor by the Milward flippancy and inappreciation, nor the Stanforth reprobation, nor the Harrison dignified horror, but by a serenity that proclaimed good nerves, and which were replied to in a manner to suggest a delicate power of retort, after this infallible test the doctor was satisfied that Miss Fane was not a fool. It was evident that she shared her brother's power of appreciating his peculiar style of conversation, and he allowed himself to talk at ease.

"What a number of birds!" exclaimed Sibyl, glancing from the aviaries to the pigeons. "This must surely be the show place of the town."

"It isn't shown though," said the doctor, drily.

"No?"

"No. A man's a fool if he can't keep his best things to himself. Do you suppose it is necessary to my happiness to have all the gaping idiots of my acquaintance pestering me with their ridiculous admiration, and still more ridiculous advice? Heaven forefend! What a gabbling

there would be! Wait till you know the people of this town, Miss Fane. A rich treat lies before you."

"I am glad of that."

"So am I—for your sake. What story do you suppose got afloat soon after I set up bird-keeping?"

Sibyl considered a moment. "That you lived on pigeon-pie, perhaps."

"Worse—infinately worse. I could have forgiven the pigeon-pie—though it is not by any means a favourite dish of mine—or if even they had discovered I had a contract to supply all the poulterers in the town—I believe, by-the-by, there was some story to that effect—but these narrow-minded, cold-hearted, respectable lunatics positively made out that I 'raised' these little creatures for the purposes of vivisection—positively!"

"Oh!" cried Sibyl.

"Fact. Their blind belief in my devotion to science, made me long to justify it by a trial of *human* vivisection. That was my only temptation to cruelty. I didn't yield to it, you know."

Sibyl laughed. "I can understand how great the temptation must have been."

"It's recurrent, too, that's the worst of it,"

said the doctor, whimsically. "I haven't forgiven them yet, and I am not anxious about doing it, either. The best of it was their utter unconsciousness of the enormity of the suggestion. Milward, the brewer, went so far as to applaud my love for science, and talked some cant about sacrificing the lower nature for the good of the higher, and was good enough to suggest a certain poison he wished to learn the action of."

"What did you say?"

"Oh, I was civil," said the doctor. "I told him his desire was laudable, that I would gladly assist at any scientific researches he cared to make; and, as personal experience was beyond doubt the most valuable and impressive, he had only to appoint the day and hour, and I would administer as strong a dose as he desired. He didn't remember to appoint a time, however. You must know Milward. We are very proud of him. He is our great leader of culture, our universal critic. His genius for criticism is marvellous in its versatility. Nothing is too high, nothing is too low for it—from a disquisition upon Milton, to the lyrical merits of the popular street song; from a lecture upon the principles of art, to the playing of a polka, it is all one. He is equally at home, and as well provided with platitudes."

"He must be very amusing," said Sibyl.

"He is—when he is not tedious. So far I have generally had the misfortune to come across him in his tedious moods. But he is not the only curiosity in Wanningster's collection of 'human various.' There is our Rector"—the doctor paused and then added contemptuously—"well, I suppose 'God made him, and therefore let him pass for a man.'"

"Tell me about him," said Sibyl.

"He's a dear creature," drawled Fullagher, "but as a man he's a mistake. Modern progress—so called—is going to turn women into men. In this age of electric light, telephones, and all the rest of the horrible inventions, such a change is a mere juggler's feat; but a man into a woman—ye gods of progress and ingenuity! surely that is a retrograde movement?—a case of 'advancing three steps backwards,' as the showman said?"

"Yes, indeed! You *are* behind the times. You must surely be returning to the dark ages!"

"Are we?" said the doctor, with a fine gloom, "I wish we were. I should get a chance of paying off many an old score then that cannot legally be settled with modern coin. We certainly haven't got the electric light yet—by-the-by, I wonder Milward has not thought of

agitating the borough on that head. What a subject for his eloquence! I must really suggest it to him. It will add an interest to his days—a good thirty of them, at least—and like all benevolent people I love to do a kindly deed when it gives me no trouble. Such a versatile genius as his needs endless variety to keep it going. No, we still grope our way by the inefficient light of gas, it is true, but no town can taunt us with the reproach of being in a state of intellectual darkness.” Pause. “Have we not a lady-doctor?”

“So my brother told me. I am sure you want nothing more.”

“Nothing,” said the doctor, in a suppressed voice. “On that fact we rest our claims to enlightenment. But let me give you a word of advice, Miss Fane,” he went on in his ordinary tone. “You are visiting us in troublous times; it is a friend’s duty to give you some little insight into the state of the town’s politics.”

“Pray do! There is nothing I should like better.” Fullagher placed a seat for her and took another opposite. He looked at her impressively. “If I were you I wouldn’t mention Miss Romney’s name to your brother.”

“Dear me!” said Sibyl. “Has it a bad effect upon him?”

“Case of red rag,” said the doctor, confidentially. “He is her sworn enemy.”

“But why? Why should he wish to interfere with her? The town is large enough, there must surely be more than two doctors in the place?”

“Several more. The town is large enough and the doctors are numerous enough, but the town is not elastic—it is clique-y. Now the best clique, the one with the greatest number of rich and important families, is *our* clique. I enjoyed its patronage for many years. Then it threw me over and took up with Penthesilea—”

“Penthesilea?”

“The Amazon—Miss Romney. Your brother has come and has got a good start and introduction to the same clique—it won’t support them both; ergo, they are close rivals, and it must be a hand-to-hand struggle.”

“And which do you think will win?”

“Your brother,” said the doctor, smiling. “Is he not Achilles?”

“It is the first I have heard of his being so. Why do you call him Achilles?”

“Because I call *her* Penthesilea.”

“Then why do you call her Penthesilea?”

“Don’t you know the story of that famous Amazon?”

“I may have heard it—I can’t remember.”

said Sibyl. "I should like to hear it now. I am very ignorant."

"Surely not!" said Fullagher. "You live in the present day, don't you? Young ladies learn everything now. That is one reason why I gave up going out to dinner-parties—I was afraid of being questioned and of exposing my ignorance."

"Please tell me about Penthesilea!"

The doctor cleared his throat and stroked his beard. "It must be very roughly then," said he, "for I am morally sure I shall not shine in telling a classical story. However, I can give you the gist of it. Penthesilea was an Amazon queen, and she went to the relief of Troy. She got over old Priam—whom we'll charitably suppose to have been in his second childhood—and led out the Trojans to fight against the besiegers. The attacking party were successful at first and were carrying all before them, and no doubt enjoying themselves amazingly, when Achilles and another fellow—observe that this is not even an attempt at classical language—returned to the Greek camp and heard of the evil doings. They flew to arms at once and rushed to the rescue. H'm, that sentence rings better."

"Well?" said Sibyl.

"The other fellow routed the general host, while Achilles tackled Penthesilea in single combat, and slew her."

"Oh, how sad!"

"Sad?" cried Fullagher, bending his bushy brows. "*This* is sad, if you like. So far the story is admirable, but now it takes a most unnecessary and exasperating turn. After he had given the mortal blow he took off her helmet and saw her face, and," added the doctor in tones of disgust, "that finished *him*."

"Was the sight fatal?"

"Quite fatal. He fell in love—and so did she."

"Oh!" Sibyl drew a long breath, and her grey eyes widened dreamily.

"We'll stop before we get to that anti-elimax in this modern aeting of the story," said the doctor, reassuringly. "Don't be afraid for your brother, Miss Fane—he can take care of himself. The play shall be played to the last stroke to her successes and no further."

"It is a lovely and pathetic story," said she, musingly. Fullagher cast a sidelong glance at her and sprang up. He had no taste for sentiment, and he hastily went off to something else.

"Let me show you round the garden," he said.

"How lovely the flowers are!" exclaimed

Sibyl, brightly, as she got up. "It is a dream of colour."

"You like it?" observed the doctor, well pleased at her admiration. "I have a treasure of a gardener," he added.

"Jackson?" inquired Sibyl, demurely.

"Yes, Jackson," with a quick smile. "He is an oddity. He rarely speaks. He has no opinions, no thoughts on any subject except gardening. At his own work he is a genius, but he can't talk about it. If I ask him what he intends doing about a certain bed, he can't *tell* me—he can only do it. He is the severest man of action I have ever come across, and therefore I treasure him."

They came to a fine rose-tree laden with flowers, and he pointed it out with pride.

"Look," he said, slipping the stalk of one between his fingers to raise the heavy close-petalled beauty.

Sibyl admired warmly and bent her head to enjoy the scent.

"Are you fond of flowers?" asked Dr. Fullagher, almost sadly.

"I love them," she said, rapturously, and with malicious intent added no more.

"Every girl says that—I might have known," muttered the doctor. He sighed, and after a

little fumbling in his pocket reluctantly produced a penknife.

Sibyl let him open it and cast a mournful glance over the roses in search of a satisfactory victim before she prevented the sacrifice.

"I love them very much, but I would rather let them grow and be happy in the sunshine as long as they can. Don't cut any, please, Dr. Fullagher."

The knife was returned to its resting-place with a joyful alacrity, and the gladness of relief spread itself over the doctor's florid features. He stroked his beard contentedly and surveyed Sibyl with his serious, slightly puzzled air of scrutiny.

"Yes, it's a great pity to cut flowers—a great pity," he said, very cordially.

When Fane returned from his modest rounds and called next door to inform Dr. Fullagher of the last addition to his practice, he found his sister in the very heart of the old bachelor's jealously-guarded domains, and already on friendly terms with their owner. The two were strolling about and talking with the ease of old friends. Dr. Fullagher received Fane's look of astonishment with an air of reckless bravado, and escaped being put to confusion by launching forth into an attack upon his friend's affectation of being busy.

"If three calls take you as many hours you had better advertise at once that your practice is strictly limited. We shouldn't like you to break down through over-work."

"He is new to it, you see," added Sibyl. "Experience will enable him to arrange his work more methodically."

"Let us hope so," said Fullagher. "But it is a most unblushing attempt to impose upon you, Miss Fane. He can't attempt it with me because I know his sick-list by heart."

"Oh, do you?" said Fane. "Then how do you account for the fact that I have called at five houses instead of three?"

"Ah?" with quick interest. "Mrs. Godwin. I presume, is the fourth. Who is the fifth?"

"Miss Harrison's."

"Of course!" cried the doctor, with a great laugh. "I might have guessed that. She made protestations—good Lord! She's a noble woman—a true woman!"

"She did not send for me for herself, but for some of the pupils. She was frank about it. She told me she acted under compulsion, that the parents had insisted upon it when their daughters appeared threatened with scarlet-fever."

"Never mind what she *says* if she acts in a

sane manner. She'll send for you under compulsion for herself next. I have perfect faith in the sterling quality of her good sense. It has been obscured lately, and now it will shine forth all the brighter."

Sibyl had moved away a little, and was trying to coax some of the pigeons to her.

Fane took advantage of the opportunity and looked significantly at his friend.

"Well, Fullagher! For a beginning this does you credit."

The doctor was watching Sibyl's efforts with a benevolent expression. He glanced sharply at Fane.

"Oh, I don't mind *her*," he said, and then added with a little laugh, "By Jove, she'll startle the natives!"





CHAPTER XII.

IN THE LIBRARY.

It was pleasant to Fane as he descended the stairs next morning to know that his sister was in the same house, and to have her bright society to look forward to. A glance at the two cups on the breakfast-table reminded him that solitary meals were over for a season. A half-smile softened his handsome face as he opened the 'Wanningster Daily Advertiser;' there was an air of well-being and prosperous content about him as he stood on the hearthrug, tall, strong, and careless.

A clear voice rang out gaily up-stairs. The smile brightened in Fane's dark eyes. He threw down the paper with unusual indifference to the morning's news, and looked towards the door. The voice came quickly nearer, there was a sound of running footsteps across the hall, and Sibyl, fair and bright as the morning, appeared. The sunbeams streaming through the old-fashioned, oaken-framed window fell dazzlingly on her golden hair and her dress of favourite white

as she came to greet her brother. That done, she made a gay dart at the blind. "The sun doesn't agree with carpets, you helpless man," she exclaimed. "Do you want a faded pathway across your floor? It is well I have come to your rescue!"

Walter, roused to unusual animation, brought in the breakfast with an approach to light-footed activity.

"Any letter for me?" asked Sibyl, as she poured out the coffee.

Her brother was carelessly tossing over the little heap beside his plate — most of the envelopes proclaiming circular very plainly in their general style. He raised his eyebrows. "The first morning?"

"I thought Aunt Fane might have found it necessary to pour out her soul on paper," observed Sibyl. "How many lumps of sugar, Austin?"

"Two, please. You could hardly expect her to write the very day you left her."

Sibyl was too much absorbed in her self-imposed task of finding two lumps of sugar as near as possible of the same shape and size to say anything.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Fane. "Here's her writing after all."

Sibyl took the first pieces of sugar that came, passed her brother's cup, and smilingly held out her hand for her letter.

"You are a more devoted aunt and niece than I took you for," observed Fane, as he gave it to her.

"You see my hurry in coming here rather cut aunt's reproaches short," explained Sibyl.

She opened the letter at once, and merely ran her eye over the reproachful sentences till she came to the second page of the second sheet. Then a name occurred, and she read what followed carefully, a soft mischievous smile curving her rosy lips.

"I can attempt no description of my feelings when Mr. Lester called and I was obliged to tell him of your undutiful and most shockingly capricious conduct. Had I followed my inclination, I would not have had him admitted; but painful, utterly distressing as it was, I felt it my duty to grant him an explanatory interview. It was some faint gratification to me to find that he was partially prepared for my distressing communication. Indeed, he admitted in so many words that you and he had had a disagreement last evening, and that you had dismissed him; but, as he said further, he had believed it was only a lover's quarrel—he could not believe

you seriously intended it. I did not know what words to use to express my deep sorrow at what had occurred. But it is all over now, and if it is any gratification to you to know that you have offended him irretrievably, and that there is not the faintest shadow of a hope that he will allow himself to be deluded by you again, you may rest content such is the case. You have certainly *killed* his love—whether you have broken his heart or no,—most probably you have broken it, for he was madly in love, if ever a man was. He did not even ask where you had gone. There is no danger of his troubling to discover the place of your retreat, for when I told him it was your wish to have it kept secret, he bowed with a cold hauteur it was impossible to misconstrue. My *only* consolation, if consolation it can be called, is in the fact that your engagement had not been made public. I dare not think what would be said if it were known that you had thrown over a suitor after accepting him only four days before.”

More lamentations followed.

“A fairly long effusion,” remarked Fane, as Sibyl refolded the sheets.

“Aunt Fane has the pen of a ready-writer,” she murmured.

"It seems to have amused you."

"Her letters are always amusing. Here, you may read the first sheet,—it will serve as a sample of the whole."

Fane shrank and refused the offer with energy.

"I have samples—somewhere. I can always refer to them when I wish to refresh my memory."

They were still at breakfast when Dr. Fullagher made his appearance. He came in with the virtuous vigour and freshness of a man who has been for an early walk and got ahead of his neighbours in the day's proceedings. He carried a dainty little basket filled with exotics and ferns, which he gave to Sibyl. "I fear I was somewhat churlish yesterday about those roses," he said. "The fact is, I don't like cutting flowers I have seen grow; but these pampered green-house productions are another matter. They are made to be cut. I got them at Hooper's, the florist's, in London Road."

Sibyl was expressing admiration and thanks, but the doctor cut her short. "Never mind. I only brought them to set my mind at rest," and he cast a hostile glance at Fane, who was leaning back in his chair and looking on with an amusement significant and disagreeable to his friend.

"The hand of the novice shows there," observed Fane in a kind of aside.

"You mean the tongue," said Fullagher, sharply. "No novice arranged those flowers."

"Did Hooper?" asked Sibyl, looking up innocently. "He has arranged them exquisitely."

"Hooper?" said the doctor. "Hardly. The Philistine wanted to cram them into a tight circle—what he called a boo-kett—one of those abominable affairs with paper round. 'Heaven forgive you, man,' said I, 'did you ever see flowers growing jammed together in a bunch like that?' But he is not altogether an idiot—he has glimmerings. He looked on for a moment with an utterly fatuous expression as I shovelled them into the basket, and then a slow smile crept over his countenance—when it had extended itself from ear to ear, he spoke. 'Well, sir,' he said, ponderously, 'I can't say as I've seen them grow up in baskets neither.' He had me there," said the doctor, frankly; "I shall patronize him again. 'Wit shall not go unrewarded' where I can give my custom."

And, having relieved his conscience, the doctor threw himself back comfortably into his chair. "Well," said he to Fane, "what are you going to do for your sister's amusement this morning?"

"Why," replied Fane, thoughtfully, "I have

felt at a loss. I was thinking of coming to ask for your advice and—help.”

“I forgot,” said Fullagher, blandly. “You are such a busy man just now. Your pentagonal rounds will leave you no spare time.”

After this passage-at-arms, however, an arrangement was peaceably made. Sibyl expressed a wish to see something of the town, and, if possible, some of the inhabitants upon whom the doctor's scorn was so lavishly bestowed, and both gentlemen agreed that a visit to Spencer's library was the first step to be taken towards the latter object, at least. Saturday was a favourite day with the Waunningsterians for changing their novels, and Sibyl of course must take out her library subscription, a constant supply of fiction being absolutely necessary to a lady's comfort.

“Go about noon,” said Fullagher, “and it will be strange if you don't see ‘someone as is someone,’ as my friend Joel would say.”

“This is delightful,” cried Sibyl. “These people will be far more fun than those in London.”

She had an interview with Kezia—whom she left in a somewhat startled condition—and then went for a walk with her brother. He took her up London Road, past the race-course and toll-

gate, showing her the wealthiest part of what he already looked upon as his professional kingdom. Everything pleased and interested Sibyl. She admired Wanninger greatly; it was so clean, so bright-looking, so toy-like after grimy London; the race-course was delightful, and the pretty, prosperous villas in their well-kept gardens promised wealthy patients and, perhaps, pleasant companions. She regarded every well-dressed woman and girl with keen interest,—it was curious to speculate who they were, and whether they belonged to Miss Romney's flourishing practice. Fane could give her little help—he knew so few people yet.

"Fullagher would have been of great use," he said. "He could have acted as a walking directory. But even he would not know everyone—the town is too large. Ah," he added, raising his hat as a dog-cart rattled past, "there goes the great man."

"Who is he?"

"Chutterworth—about the richest fellow in the place—spoken of indifferently by the doctor as a blatant and a bloated idiot."

"Do you know these girls?" asked Sibyl softly, as three very tall young ladies, fashionably dressed, talking loudly and volubly, and accompanied by as many dogs, bore down upon

them. They one and all fixed a stony stare upon the brother and sister, and passed on in uninterrupted flow of talk.

"Only by sight," said Fane. "Fullagher pointed them out one day. They are Warrens, daughters of the first lawyer in the town, and somewhat terrible specimens of the modern empty-headed girl, I believe."

"They carried novels!" exclaimed Sibyl. "It is time we went to Spencer's!"

Fane turned at once. A brougham passed them swiftly. Sibyl looked almost excited. "I wonder if that was Miss Romney!"

"I didn't see if it was man or woman. Most probably it was Miss Romney—she will have more to do in this part than any of the other doctors. That gentleman on the other side, Sibyl, in the clerical hat, is Mr. Stauforth, the Rector of St. Matthew's, the fashionable church. Observe the dejection of his face and mien. He is evidently beating his brains for to-morrow's discourse."

Sibyl examined the clergyman with unfeigned delight. "Wanningster is perfectly charming," she said. "It is greater fun than I expected."

"This is the Ardley nursery establishment. I believe," said Fane, glancing at three little girls who were walking demurely with their nurse-

maid, and who stopped short and gazed up at him with the frank and unabashed curiosity of small children. "Ardley?" repeated Sibyl. "The name sounds familiar—oh, I remember! I knew a young man with that name in London last year. He was very nice too, poor fellow."

"Why poor?"

They had repassed the race-course and reached the lower gate. Just as they did so, a girl came through the small one at the side used by pedestrians. It was Winifred, returning from a walk. She glanced at them as they passed, and they caught a full view of a fair young face and large hazel eyes under the shadow of a broad hat.

As soon as they were out of hearing Sibyl exclaimed, "What a pretty little thing! *She* looks nice."

"I caught a glimpse of her a few days ago," said Fane. "I wonder who she is. I hope a kind fate will call me in to her family. She is *very* bonny."

They were soon in the cheerful bustle of the town, and in due course entered Spencer's library. That haunt of the fashionable public was not very full just then. Two stout elderly ladies, who had evidently driven in from the country that morning, were exchanging books, and gossiping with the librarian. A youth about nineteen

stood at the shelves where the works of Lytton shone conspicuous, and greedily devoured 'Rienzi'; and a girl sat near the table. The girl attracted Sibyl's attention chiefly. Did she belong to one of the families in the set that had been Dr. Fullagher's, was now Miss Romney's, and had to be her brother's? Judging from her appearance it seemed very likely. She had the air of being well-to-do, and her dress, a flowing scanty robe of queer dingy tint, showed confidence in her position. She was thin and angular and delicate-looking; her colourless light hair was frizzed untidily over her low forehead, her hat was remarkable in shape and colour, and her long wash-leather gloves were ugly in the extreme. She lounged limply in her chair, indolently turning over the pages of a novel, and when the Fanes entered gave them a lazy inspection and then went on with her book.

No recognition passed between her and Austin, so Sibyl could not expect to learn who the young lady was. She looked at 'Punch' while she waited for the librarian's attention, and Fane took up the 'Times.'

Sibyl was confirmed in her idea about this untidy young lady by the consciousness that she and her brother were objects of interest in turn—especially herself, for the lazy glances from

those pale half-closed eyes were directed oftenest to her, and took in, she was sure, every detail of her dress and appearance.

Presently the æsthetic lady closed her book, and a livelier expression brightened the listless boredom of her face as she looked through the doorway leading into the shop. Between the heavy curtains came a girl with light quick footsteps—the girl they had passed at the race-course gate. In everything she presented a contrast to the other. What was colourless, washed-out, untidy in the first, was bright, dainty, and trim with her. Her dress was crisp and fresh; her pretty face, tinged with soft rose-colour, animated and smiling, as she came in with a laugh dying from her lips, evidently caused by some speech of the gentleman who followed. Sibyl noticed that her brother was known to the new-comer at least by sight, for she turned her head away rather quickly when she saw him, looking all at once quite grave. She and the limp young lady shook hands.

“What have you brought back, Winnie?” asked the latter, inspecting the two volumes which the young man placed upon the table. “Is it nice?”

“No, stupid rubbish,” replied Winnie, in a remarkably sweet refined voice.

"Really? I'm surprised at your reading rubbish."

"My dear, I didn't. Despair seized me in the middle of the second chapter—I completely lost my way among the fathers and grandfathers and the brothers' families. I shall have something more solid this time."

"And Mr. Ardley, I suppose, will help you to choose."

"I shall be very grateful if he will," said Winifred, laughingly glancing towards him.

"To tell the truth," said Mona to Oscar, "I am struck dumb with amazement at beholding you here."

"I did notice a constraint in your usual fluency," said he. "It is a relief to know nothing more serious caused it."

"A wild rumour reached me," said Mona, "that you were a reformed character—that you had actually taken to business—and incredible as it seemed I was glad to try and believe it; especially as it was confirmed by Reginald, who, only yesterday, brought home the startling intelligence that he had seen you *inside* the house of Ardley and Co."

"He was quite right. I am sorry though to have caused my friends such a shock."

The two stout ladies had departed, and Sibyl,

as she transacted her business, could not help hearing the friends' chatter. She stood behind in the shadow.

Winifred was reading the titles of the row of books on the table, and Oscar leaned against it with his back to that part of the room where the librarian's desk stood. Fane had gone into the shop to speak to the ubiquitous Mr. Spencer.

"I suppose you are making the momentous change by degrees," said Mona.

"Yes—I am not a fixture in the office as you appear to be here. When I begin to droop over my desk and to turn pale, my father sends me out for a little fresh air. He is quite humane for an employer."

"Papa promised to meet me here at half-past eleven," pouted Mona. "I have waited hours for him. I have felt as dull as Peter Bell the Third."

"What a pity you came so soon," said Winifred, taking up her sunshade. "Good-bye, Mona, I shall not take anything with me now as I am going further into the town."

"Well, I'm as fast here as Andromeda on the rock," sighed Mona.

Sibyl had paid her subscription, and now moved towards the door to look for her brother. Oscar drew aside the curtain for Winifred to pass

through, when he caught sight of Miss Fane. He started, reddened and turned pale, and then hastily acknowledged her smiling bow by a stiff, awkward inclination.

Winifred saw the curious recognition, and walked down the shop and out into the street with a stunned sense of miserable confusion upon her. He had looked so strange; and now, as he followed and joined her, his face was startled, almost agitated. They had only met at the door as Winifred was going in, and she held out her hand to take leave.

“Good morning, Mr. Ardley. I am going this way.”

“Oh, are you going?” he rejoined, in vague absence of manner. “Good morning” He raised his hat mechanically and strode up the street.

Winifred went her way pondering over the meaning of this mysterious recognition. Who was this tall, fair, brilliant stranger? What secret could there be between her and Oscar Ardley to cause that strange disturbance on his part?—to cause him to part from her so absently—why he had looked as if he had forgotten her presence!—an immense difference to his ever-cordial courtesy. She was chilled and frightened. The poor child carried a tired and troubled heart with her that morning as she did her errands.



CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE RACE-COURSE.

OSCAR'S secret was a very simple one.

After leaving Oxford he had spent several months in London, for his father was in no hurry to tie him down to business, and indeed had ambition enough to think of a profession for his son. Office work seemed ill-suited to the handsome Oxonian with his refined and intellectual tastes,—the general impression given by the young man was that he was meant for something better. As, however, he showed no leaning towards any one particular calling, it was deemed advisable he should have time allowed to make up his mind, and, by enjoying the advantages of London life and travel, see something of the world—an operation which might assist him in coming to a decision. These advantages were keenly appreciated by Oscar. The idle life of amusement was so much to his taste that there was grave danger of his being in no haste to adopt any more serious walk of life.

He remained as unbiassed towards the professions and arts as when he left Oxford, but he extended his experience in a direction unanticipated by his father—he fell in love,—love of the most extravagant kind. He saw a great deal of Sibyl Fane, and fell a hopeless victim to her charms. Sibyl was one of those women who with a charming manner and kind of brilliant power and ease attract men wherever they go. Though not strictly beautiful, her expression was so varying and full of vivacity that she could look beautiful, brilliantly so, at times ; and she was bewitching. She was so sure of herself, so fascinating. Osear was merely one admirer amongst others, and his rivals were all more or less men of greater consequence. Still Sibyl was kind, as she was to almost all up to a certain stage—thereby winning for herself some hard names from all in turn—she liked the handsome fellow ; and his thorough whole-hearted passion won a certain amused respect. She was so used to men's admiration and homage that, as a rule, she was careless of what she received so lavishly. Men did not impress her. Some were amusing ; and from those she took what amused her, turning rather coldly away when symptoms of serious feeling became perceptible. Oscar won a similar rebuff ; but

was too desperately in earnest to take warning from it. The torments of jealousy added intensity to his passion, and he still haunted the places where it was possible to see and meet Miss Fane. Her decided refusal was a cruel blow.

He fled from London and rushed abroad, and in roaming about the continent tried to distract his mind and overcome his rage and pain. The battle was hard ; but pride helped him greatly, and when he finally returned home, it was with the hope that he would eventually get the mastery over that tyrannous passion. He was melancholy, and had formed rather gloomy views of life. The experience of that sharp and violent love had been an education in itself. He was older, harder, and listlessly indifferent.

Then he met Winifred. It was a pleasure to know her after expecting nothing but cruel boredom from the ladies of his town—the Chutterworths, whom he shrank from ; Mona Milward and the Warrens, whom he had played with when children, and who were as a consequence too fatally familiar to attract. But Winifred was quite fresh. She was exceedingly pretty ; and Oscar soon found that the London episode had not blinded his eyes to feminine beauty for the rest of his life. She was well-

educated and accomplished; in short, she was a charming surprise, and acquaintance with her helped forward his recovery with great rapidity. And then it was delightful to find, as it needed very little vanity to do, that his society was pleasant to her. With Sibyl that charm of adding something to her life had been altogether wanting. She had as much society, both amusing and agreeable, as she could desire. But there was no one to share his consequence with Winifred. He possessed advantages none of the youth of Wanningster could boast,—until his appearance on the scene she had certainly been debarred from congenial masculine acquaintance. A new love, a quiet affection free from all the pains and fevers of the first, gradually grew in its place. The new one offered no inducements to rave; but it was so tender, so restful. It was, as he had said, like health after a fever.

Hearing the name of Fane at The Elms that memorable evening proved undoubtedly a shock. Oscar was disagreeably startled at the rush of memory and feeling it brought to him. He began to doubt. Was he after all mistaken about the death of that first passion? Was it only slumbering after all?—suppose, suppose it should wake up! He felt it would be well

to try and find if possible how matters really were with his heart. A short absence would prove what hold Winifred had upon his affection; and he went abroad, and paid hasty visits to those scenes where he had suffered the full misery of his disappointment, and where he had roamed, assured that the "light out of all life" was gone for him. To his content and exultation that time seemed very far past then, and the remembrance of his sufferings quite faint and elusive. He thought decidedly more of the quiet graceful girl he had just left than of his fascinating first love. Winifred was like a sweet possession of great value; he missed her; he wished for her; he found that he wanted to refer to her constantly; to ask what she thought of this and of that. The knowledge that she was living so near his home made the going back more of a pleasure than it had ever been. The first morning after his return he met her, and the sight of her coming up the road towards him made his heart go forth gladly to meet her.

And now, close upon this regaining of his mind's peace, came this sudden meeting in the library. It was entirely unexpected, and the shock was of a corresponding degree. Oscar was startled, agitated, and for the first few moments too confused to know very well what

he did. He strode off through the streets, forgetting Winifred and the errand that had brought him into the town. His first clear idea was anger; he was angry with himself because the abruptness of the affair had had such effect upon him, and doubly angry with Sibyl, because of its being so, and because she had seen his perturbation. A feeling of excited defiance followed,—he would show her how completely he had got over it! She should see how happily he had consoled himself! Poor Oscar was not aware how ominous this savage determination was—surely a strange result of indifference, this anxiety as to her thoughts of him.

Then with a sharp pulling of himself together he remembered his parting with Winifred. He turned hot with annoyance and mortification. What must she think of him? What could she think of such extraordinary conduct? And how could he explain and put things right? There was no explanation possible, of course, but the true one—only he shrank from telling that story of his infatuation. And, indeed, would it not destroy his chances with her after what she had witnessed this morning? He put the suggestion aside. She had seen nothing after all—merely his start of surprise at unexpectedly meeting a lady; and there was no need to vex her about

it. When they were engaged, he would tell her he had had his time of folly like all other men.

He must see her as soon as possible to find out how she had taken his cavalier farewell. Unfortunately, he had called only yesterday—however, there was a chance of meeting her on the race-course this evening. And would it not be better to push matters on and try his fate? He would feel then—what, *safe*? There was no need of an engagement to secure him against a second surprise!—the point was the proof of faithlessness it would give to Sibyl. Ah, what a different, what a much more suitable wife his new love would make for a man! Who could hope for peace and satisfaction with one accustomed to as much flattery and homage as Sibyl Fane was? “She is a coquette,” he said to himself, with a pang of fierce anger and unwilling admiration.

He went to the race-course that evening; for he was too anxious to see Winifred, and too excited, to wait for a pretext of calling at Miss Romney’s.

The race-course was a great resort for the Wanningsterians on the summer evenings. It lay above the town, and if a breath of air was to be found, it was always coolest and freshest

there. Then cricket formed a great attraction. The young men practised regularly during the season ; and their friends sauntered about outside the barriers, looking on at the slender young figures in their white flannel and gay caps, and gossiping with their acquaintances. This last summer an immense addition had been made in the matter of a band. The music added exhilaration and an air of holiday and fashion to the course. People enjoyed walking and talking to the accompaniment of familiar airs and the newest waltzes.

"'Pon my soul," exclaimed Mr. Chutterworth, in the exuberance of his pleasure, "the band gives the course a wonderful touch of elegance. Really, there will soon be no need for us to henvy the Londoners in the way of parks and music."

This was perhaps the exaggeration of a genial spirit elevated to its most hopeful mood by a refined pleasure. Dr. Fullagher, at least, did not regard the matter with equal enthusiasm. He rarely stirred out of his own domains in the evening ; but on one occasion he did find his way to the race-course. 'Auld Lang Syne' was being performed, and the doctor bore the simple melody with fortitude, only wincing now and then at a louder blast from the bass instrument ;

but when the air was repeated with brazen variations, his countenance changed. "May the powers above forgive you," he said, in answer to the above speech, and, turning, he fled from the place with his hands over his ears.

The band was playing spiritedly this evening. The cricketers were batting, bowling, running, shouting and clapping as creatures inspired, and the pedestrians strolled hither and thither. The music, the cricket-playing, the talk and laughter, and the gay dresses, made quite a holiday spectacle. Reginald Milward was conspicuous as the poorest and most ardent player; and Oscar came upon his sister leaning over the rope dividing the players from the spectators, with the faithful Jack in attendance.

Mona greeted him with a quotation very indolently delivered. "'If these be true spies which I wear in my head, here's a goodly sight,'" indicating the cricketers.

"Reginald is enjoying himself," said Oscar.

"He always gets delirious on these occasions," lisped Mona, languidly. "I thought you studied book-keeping in the evenings, Mr. Ardley. 'Poor worm, thou art infected! This visitation shows it.'"

"Your quotations always let us into the secret of your last hour's reading, Miss Milward."

"Why," cried Jack, "how can you tell that? I'm sure I never guess what Miss Milward is quoting."

"You don't do yourself justice," murmured Mona. "I am sorry, though, Mr. Ardley, that my calling you a worm has made you show the trodden reptile's revengeful spirit. Perhaps you are looking for some one. You have seen my long-necked brother already, and have betrayed no desire to fall upon his neck. Papa is to the left there, explaining the principles of homœopathy to Mr. Robinson, who, worthy man, has shown unmistakable symptoms of restlessness. I see you are eager to take his place, so pray don't let any considerations for me prevent you from adding to your stores of knowledge."

"I know too little of homœopathy to take enough interest in the subject," replied Oscar.

"It's rather odd," mused Mona. "All papa's friends say the same. 'Where they do agree on the stage, their unanimity is wonderful' Mr. Chutterworth expressed last evening, however, a more decided opinion than you and the others. He said homœopathy was—do you remember what?" to Jack.

"Rotten humbug," said Jack, promptly.

"Only fit for old women who are in a condition opposite to that of blessedness," added

Mona. "So my mind is now set at rest as to papa's future well-being."

Jack suddenly burst into a roar of laughter. "Old Robinson would give a fiver to be out of this," he said, gazing with huge enjoyment at the burly victim to Mr. Milward's eloquence. "Did you ever hear that story about him?"

"I don't remember it from that description," said Mona.

"Well, you know, he went to a subscription ball once when he was at Brighton, and the doctor, Dr. Fullagher, you know, asked him when he'd got back how he'd enjoyed it. Robinson, who was measuring the doctor at the time, gave himself grand airs. 'Oh,' he said, 'the company was mixed, it was very mixed.' 'Why, hang it all, man,' said the doctor, 'you couldn't expect them *all* to be tailors.' I was in the shop at the time, but it was too much for me—I bolted. By Jove," said Jack, "I laughed for the next half hour."

"Dr. Fullagher would enjoy it," said Oscar.

He took leave of the two and sauntered on, skirting the cricket-ground, nodding to an acquaintance here and there, and keeping a keen look-out for a well-known face. He had steered his way through the liveliest part, and was beginning to fear disappointment, when he caught

sight of the person he sought. The delay made the little piece of good fortune doubly welcome. He quickened his steps, and hastened forward with an eager, animated expression. Winifred, who was walking with Edith, could not fail to notice the pleasure the meeting gave him; and in quick response her own face lighted up; the shadows of dejection left her. There was no mistaking his manner now, and though she could not delude herself by supposing that that little scene in Spencer's library had been a dream, it was easy to believe that no meaning which could hurt her fresh love and trust need explain it. Oscar read forgiveness in her shy sweet smile as he joined them, walking on Edith's other side. When they reached the corner of the quiet side of the race-course he begged them to turn back, instead of going on to the more crowded part.

"'All the world and his wife' are out this evening, and how can one enjoy fresh air and relaxation if one is constantly bowing to acquaintances?" was his pathetic complaint.

Edith smilingly agreed, saying she shared his taste for peace and quiet. She and Oscar did the chief talking, which was rather an unusual thing, for Edith was by no means a great talker. Winifred said little. For once Oscar felt a

consciousness in her presence which acted like shyness; it made him hesitate to address her directly; it made, too, words almost unnecessary. Those rare occasions on which he caught her eye were worth more than speech, and were three times as eloquent.

They walked to the end nearest the London Road, and there Edith stopped and held out her hand.

"We must go home now. Good evening, Mr. Ardley."

Oscar accepted the dismissal, squeezed Winifred's fingers, raised his hat and turned; while the two ladies kept within the hedge upon the grass as they proceeded to the large entrance gate.

They reached it just as Mr. Chutterworth was entering, accompanied by a friend. The manufacturer was in the joyous elevation of his after-dinner mood, and in that mood his patronage extended itself to every one and everything. Had he when so exhilarated met the archangel Michael taking a stroll, he would have cordially extended the right hand of fellowship, and offered to introduce him to the richest men of his acquaintance. He dropped behind his friend, and extended a large fat hand with his most gracious smile to the lady-doctor, and after to her pretty niece, and jingled pleasantly

the dozen of miscellaneous trifles attached to the two massive chains which rested magnificently upon his snowy waistcoat. "How do, Miss Romney? How do, Miss Noel? Charmin' h'evenin', isn't it? Been for your constitootion (no doubt, constitutional), I suppose? The band sounds uncommon well, don't it? There's nothin' like good rousin' toons for h'addin' h'enjoyment to the public's walks. I'm glad to have met you, Miss Romney—there's a little matter I wished to mention. Doin' it now will save callin' at your 'ouse or droppin' a line. You're not attendin' at The h'Elms just now, I believe?"

"No; not just at present."

"So I presumed," said Mr. Chutterworth.

"Well, then, I'd be much obliged if you'd send in your h'account at once—them's the sort of things I can't bear to have dawdlin' on. Pay sharp's my motto, both for self and customers, and if I 'adn't found it a *payin'* one," with husky mirth, "I shouldn't be the man I am now. I'm not easy in my mind to be h'owin' h'any one. I expect people to pay h'up directly, and I always do it myself. I'm too proud to h'owe," said Mr. Chutterworth, impressively. "That's my nature, and a man can't help his nature—and I know you work hard for your money,

Miss Romney, so if you'll just cast it up and send it in—"

Mr. Chutterworth had to look back and raise his voice a little in uttering these last hasty words, for Edith had moved on with a hurried—"Yes, certainly. Good evening!"

She was annoyed, and her beautiful face was flushed.

"Odious man!" exclaimed Winifred, indignantly. "A little wholesome adversity would do him good, I think."

"It is absurd of me to care what that vulgar man says," said Edith, with an attempt at a laugh. "But, really, if people knew how I disliked to be reminded that they pay me!—Miss Jacques would tell me I am ridiculous. If I had my own way I would never hear the word money mentioned by my patients—they should pay me in cheques sent by post. I suppose I shall get hardened to it in time."

"If any one can harden you, dear," said Winifred, "it will be the gracious Chutterworth. Under his fostering influence you may end by becoming blatant on the subject."

Winifred spent the rest of the evening singing softly at the piano in the gathering dusk. She was happy enough to enjoy the slowly waning light and paling sky, the creeping veil of grey

which was covering everything. The evening was too beautiful to be shut out by gas,—she could play and sing without light ; and she sat in the dim room all alone, singing, with dreamy face upturned to the heat-wan sky, where the stars showed but faintly, and where a new and tender moon gleamed white and pale high over all. The pure felicity of her love's first discovery would not return ; uncertainty lent preciousness and fearfulness to her love—but one ought to trust, thought Winnie, as she sang.

The room below presented a very different aspect. The curtains were drawn, the gas was lighted, and Edith sat at the table with some medical books before her. The sweet soft strains of music from the drawing-room floated down and made a pleasant accompaniment to her studying, giving a sweet sense of companionship and home-love.

Punctually at ten were heard the sounds of locking up for the night. This task was always performed by Sarah—the same Sarah who had lived with the Romneys at L—. For after the break-up of the family, just before Edith returned to Paris to finish her studies, the old servant had exacted from her the willing promise that she should live with “Miss Edith” as soon as she set up housekeeping.

Having secured the front door to her satisfaction, she entered the dining-room to say good night to her young mistress.

"It's time them books was put away, Miss Edith," she said, shaking her head disapprovingly. In speaking to Edith, Sarah had never been able to bring her tongue to use any but the old name. She was careful of course to give her mistress's proper title to outsiders; but to Edith herself the name she had called her by when a child came more natural, she stoutly declared, and was a "deal sweeter."

"Not quite, Sarah. I am making up for lost time."

"Do you call it lost time when you've been walkin' for your health?" demanded Sarah, taking up a vase and examining it grimly. This inspection of her young assistant's work gave her thoughts another vent. "What's the good of my speakin'?" she said, with the tragie calm of despair. "It's not once, or twice a day I'm at that Eliza about her dustin'—and for all the good it is I might speak to the dusters themselves. I've showed her the way till I'm tired, so there's no exkoose—she's that idle. Many's the time I tell her it's no good me tryin' to teach her proper ways, for she'll never come to no good."

"You should try to encourage her," said Edith.

"*Encourage her!*" repeated Sarah, with significant emphasis. She saw that her mistress was pre-occupied and prepared for retreat. "Well, I'll go to bed. Haven't you nearly finished, Miss Edith?"

"Yes; I shall not be long now."

"You don't give yourself no rest," said the old servant, discontentedly.

"My dear soul, I didn't open a book all last evening! I was as lazy as lazy could be."

"That's how it should be. I don't hold with all work, leastways not for a woman; women-folks ain't strong enough. It's not to their discredit—God made 'em so. But I warrant you're a bit worried:" with an insinuating look at Edith's face. Edith closed her book and leaned back with a laugh. "How can I help it when you interrupt me so!"

"I mean about this new doctor," said Sarah. "Folks tell Eliza—no one gossips with *me*—they know better—but they've been tellin' her as he's sure to get everything from you. If he does, and I suppose he will, bein' a man—for you know that *I* think as men and not women ought to doctor folks—not but what I don't believe you're as good as a many men," said the loyal

woman, "but it stands to reason as it's not women's work. The Bible says nothing about there bein' women docters among those doctors in the temple as our Saviour talked with, and if there had been, we may be sure such a curious faet would have been mentioned, for the Bible tells us all we ought to know. Anyway, you're one, and it can't be helped now, whether God meant it or didn't,—and as you've worked hard and got a good praetice together it'll be a pity if this stranger's to take it all from you ; but still, Miss Edith, if he does, you'll remember he's only an instrument in the Almighty's hands, and that he does it to show you as you've been wrong. You'll remember that, Miss Edith ?" The old servant spoke with earnest feeling and watched anxiously for an answer.

Edith had not one ready at first. She had risen, and was bending over the table putting Sarah's enemies, the big books, together, and gathering up some sheets of paper. She paused with her hands elased upon the books, and a troubled expression in her thoughtful eyes. Her face was very pale.

"I don't think I could remember it," she said, slowly. "It is a 'hard saying,' Sarah."

"Oh, Miss Edith, it will be harder for you after if you've set your heart on worldly success !"

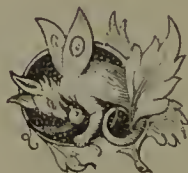
“Don’t you set your heart upon the success and well-doing of your work?” asked Edith, gently.

“But that’s different,” said Sarah. “Mine’s woman’s work, and I’m sure of it.”

“And so is mine,” said Edith, quickly, almost sharply.

But when Sarah had gone she sat down, and leaning her face on her hands shed some hot heavy tears.

“Oh, father, dear, darling father! why did you leave me? They are all trying to dishearten me.”





CHAPTER XIV.

MR. CHUTTERWORTH ON WAGES.

“An uncouth, salvage, and uncivile wight.”

SPENSER.

“Less bold than in the days of yore,
Doubting now though never before,” . . .

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

EDITH was, in truth, as Sarah's love-sharpened eyes had divined, feeling anxious just then. Her chief source of disquietude was the delicate state of Mrs. Stanforth's health; she had serious fears that her friend would not rally after August was over. Apart from the personal considerations of her own sorrow, was the effect the loss would have upon her professional reputation. She had begun to realize the stupendous force of people's unreasonableness. A month ago she would have laughed off the fear that the loss of this case would make any difference in people's confidence in her, arguing that as they were aware of Mrs. Stanforth's invalid condition, they would be anything but surprised if she did not

get over her trial. But she knew instinctively how completely the delicacy would be overlooked, and how certain she was to receive censure. Coming just now, the loss of this particular case would be a great blow to her popularity. Her reason rebelled against the conviction; her instinct felt it only too powerfully.

Competition had affected her at the very beginning, and every day its influence grew more marked. It was not so much the actual losses, for they were so far few enough, as the difference in tone and regard. She breathed insecurity in the air. All her patients prophesied—each in turn warned her that the others would forsake her, and these repeated assurances could not fail to produce a disheartening effect.

Miss Harrison's explanations and apologies had been most voluble. A mild form of scarlatina having broken out in her school, the parents had become alarmed. They had grumbled at the attendance of a lady-doctor in a way to suggest a belief that this outbreak of fever was owing to Miss Harrison's thoughtless conduct in the matter of employing a doctor, and had insisted on Dr. Fane being called in. Miss Harrison expressed cordial contempt and indignation at the benighted ignorance and narrow prejudice displayed by the British Parent in the emergency.

She condoled with Dr. Romney; exhorted her to continue staunch, and the cause would yet triumph, and warmly declared her determination to hold boldly to her own opinions—she would always employ Dr. Romney, and so would her sister, Mrs. West. This declaration being uttered in the tone of one who expects martyrdom as the price to be paid for her fidelity.

“I rarely ail—nothing beyond an occasional cold or headache, but if I were seriously ill, Dr. Romney, it would be the same. I promise you faithfully to call *you* in and no other doctor.”

Edith, strange to say, was ungrateful enough to feel a little bitter that this solemn asseveration should be thought necessary on any one's part. She felt sure that Dr. Fullagher had never been so comforted and encouraged in the early days of her arrival in Wanningster; nor was it easy to imagine any lady of her acquaintance thus expressing confidence in Dr. Fane's skill.

And Mr. Chutterworth had not shown the delight in settling her account which his words on the race-course appeared to promise. On the contrary, he expressed a most disagreeable degree of surprise at its amount, feeling that the urgency of the case necessitated the early stopping of his horses at the young doctor's door, and the entrance of her humble abode by their lordly

owner himself. He spoke on the subject with that air and tone of amazement which imply displeasure when used to an inferior. He had found it difficult to believe his eye when casting it over the account ; he felt there must be some little mistake ; Miss Romney had charged at the same rate as Dr. Fullagher.

Edith looked at the account which Mr. Chutterworth pushed across the table towards her in the manner of one who expects immediate alterations as he desires.

"I don't see any mistake," she said, after consulting her day-book. "I am very careful to set down the number of visits."

"I've nothing to say about *that*," said the manufacturer, hooking his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat and leaning back with outstretched feet. "The number of visits may be right or they may not—that's as it 'appens. I 'aven't kept count, nor 'asn't Mrs. Chutterworth. But I'm not particular about a visit or two—I know doctors often put 'em on to make up a tidier total—it's not the visits, it's the charge for 'em. Why, Miss Romney, you've charged the same for each as the h'old doctor !"

"I have charged my usual fee," said Edith.

"Eh ?"

She repeated her remark, feeling lacerated,

and as if the loss of the money ten times over would be a cheap way of freeing herself from the man's vulgar stare.

Mr. Chutterworth put his lips together for a long-drawn and significant whistle — but mercifully repressed the full strength of the performance.

"I had no h'idea of this," he remarked, in a tone that implied how thoroughly he had been imposed upon. "Not the ghost of a h'idea. Your regular charge, you say? Seems queer for a lady to charge as much as a h'ordinary doctor — deuced queer, by Jove! Why, if that's to be the little game, we may as well 'ave the real h'article at once."

"I don't understand," said Edith. "Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Chutterworth, that you consider my services as medical attendant inferior?"

"To a h'ordinary doctor's? Why, slightly," he replied, as though amused at the unnecessary question. "All female labour is inferior in the market—"

"If you thought so," interrupted Edith, her breath coming fast and her hands trembling with the strength of her indignation—"if you thought so, I wonder you would risk the health of your wife and daughters!"

“Why,” cried Mr. Chutterworth, “there wasn’t no risk. They’ve never ailed nothing but fancies these last six months! Of course,” he added, “if there’d been something serious got ’old on one of ’em such as—well, say fever or— or—well, *h’anything* dangerous, it would have been another bale of goods altogether.” This commercial illustration suggested a brilliant and final argument. “You don’t suppose I pay my female ’ands what I pay the men? By the powers, no!—nor no manufacturer don’t! That’s market law, Miss Romney, women’s work is cheaper than men’s. Stands to common-sense it must be so. A pretty state of things it would be to have women taking the work and pay from men! But it’ll be a long day first—it’ll be a long day first.”

Edith had taken up the pen and drawn back the account. “Perhaps you would not mind telling me what percentage I should take off as I am a woman?” she said, not looking at him.

Mr. Chutterworth went through some abstruse calculations with his head tilted back and his eyes fixed on the ceiling. Then he gave his opinion with business-like directness. Edith scrawled the necessary alterations, handed back the paper, and rose abruptly.

“I hope you will find that satisfactory,” she

said, unable to keep back all the scorn and contempt she felt.

But Mr. Chutterworth was not sensitive to fine inflections of tone. He was complacently conscious of having imparted a little business knowledge to a lady from his own profound stores, and felt, as well as smiled, "superior."

"That's more like," said he, encouragingly, "yes, now, that's something like." He was about to pocket the document and take his leave, but second thoughts made him spread it out upon the table and thrust his hand into the jingling recesses of his pocket.

"May as well cash up when I'm here," he said, bringing forth a handful of gold and silver. He counted out the amount—all but the odd sixpence, which no doubt he considered too small a coin to be offered in payment to a lady—and pushed it over to Edith.

"You'll find that right, Miss Romney—oh, we'll say nothing about the odd coppers," in the tone of one who deprecates acknowledgment of a small gift.

Edith did not count or even touch the money. She wrote the receipt and returned it in silence. It was impossible to utter any formula of thanks.

"And," said the manufacturer, as he put the receipt into his pocket-book, "you'll find this

the wisest course. If you want to make any way at all against competition you must under-sell, Miss Romney, you must under-sell. That's your only chance. *Good morning.*"

It would have been easy for Edith to have laughed at this incident as a mere instance of vulgar meanness, and to have cared no more about it, had she not regarded it as a coarse expression of general feeling—not extreme feeling, but what appeared to be most natural feeling. Her work must be inferior, deserved, therefore, by all that was fair, to be cheaply paid for, simply because she was a woman. This was a most unpalatable truth; but there was a rude force in Mr. Chutterworth's representation of it which could not fail to make an impression.

And moreover, there was a difference in his tone and manner significant of a change of sentiment towards her. The patronising condescension, the thorough respect—eloquent testimonies to her success—he had shown, were replaced by an off-hand carelessness verging on insolence. Knowing how anxious he was to go with the stream of fashion, Edith naturally looked upon his defection as an important current indicator. But in this instance she took alarm too soon, and under-estimated Mr. Chutterworth's independence of action. He certainly

did believe that the "new medical broom" (for his modes of alluding to Dr. Fane were almost as numerous as the allusions) would make what he happily termed a "pretty clean sweep" of Miss Romney's practice, but he had not acted so discourteously because he thought the sweeping was already in active operation. Louisa had expressed a wish that Dr. Fane should be promoted to the post of sole medical adviser in their family; she had plainly declared her intention of never allowing Miss Romney to prescribe for her again, and had added some violent expressions about both Edith and Winifred which proved they had offended her. Once assured of the reason for this dislike, for Louisa's angry hints and allusions did not permit a lengthened uncertainty, Mr. Chutterworth's resentment equalled his daughter's. What fond and spirited father, and Mr. Chutterworth was both, could tamely brook such interference with his best-beloved child? On consideration he found that he could have approved of young Ardley as a suitor for his daughter—indeed, titles not being procurable in Wanningster, he did not see that she could do much better—the young man had good looks, a university education, a well-bred, fashionable air—greatly admired by the manufacturer—and he would be able to keep

his wife in a proper degree of luxury. Yes, he could have approved of the match, and this being the case, it was unpardonable of a girl in Miss Noel's position to baulk his Louisa of her whim. Had the young man concerned been even the despised curate, Mr. Barker, who occasionally forgot himself so far as to raise adoring eyes to Sophy, Mr. Chutterworth would have resented Winifred's presumption, but, a gentleman he approved of! The wrong was without palliation indeed.

However, Mr. Chutterworth comforted himself by the wise reflection that there was as good fish in the sea as had come out of it,—the fish in this case being represented more especially by Dr. Fane. Mr. Chutterworth had been much impressed by the new doctor's appearance and manner; he felt Dr. Fane would confer distinction as a son-in-law, the exact kind, too, the self-made man was so covetous of obtaining. In point of money he was no doubt inferior to Oscar Ardley; but in other things Mr. Chutterworth had detected a most attractive superiority, and he was proudly aware that he had it in his power to amply supply the money deficiency. He could "afford" even the costly luxury of a comparatively poor husband for his darling Louisa, and that consciousness of power added

to his pleasure in the scheme. He would cultivate Dr. Fane; he knew very well that the parents of other girls would cultivate him, also, and this fact was an additional stimulus. He was sublimely confident of the superior attractions and opportunities he could offer. Who else had such a gorgeous establishment? Who in all Wanningster gave so many dinner-parties? Who could put such costly wines on the table? Who else boasted such an expensive cook—except the old doctor, who showed shameful extravagance in beating him there. No, when Mr. Chutterworth recounted his magnificent advantages, he thought of the puny efforts of his fellow-townsmen with derision. They hadn't the ghost of a chance against him, but by all means let them try. He was quite willing to gratify them by crushing them, and quite as willing that his Louisa should land the fish angled for by a dozen or so.

Edith, who knew nothing of these matrimonial designs, and judged his behaviour from what she had seen of his nervous desire to be in the foremost rank of the fashionable majority, was much harassed about the affair. It was particularly unfortunate that at so critical a time she should lose any case, more especially one of such importance. The departure of a small grocer's wife would be comparatively unnoticed; but Mrs.

Stanforth was a person of conspicuous position and consequence. Her fears received fresh cause a day or two later, when she found that Mrs. Stanforth herself shared them.

"How good it must be to be so well and beautiful," she said, one day, with affectionate admiration, when Edith had risen to take leave. She held the capable nervous fingers in her feverish hand and leaned her wasted cheek upon them.

"Dear Mrs. Stanforth, you will get well and strong when August is over," said Edith.

"I don't think so," she answered.

"But I cannot allow you to give up hope," exclaimed Edith. "That is the worst thing you can do."

"I am too tired even to care to hope," said the invalid.

"The dear children—think of them," urged Edith.

A quiver of pain passed over the thin worn face.

"I do—I do think of them—if it were not for them I should be quite ready to go. Oh, my darlings! my little darlings!" A weak sob choked her voice. It died away almost directly, and she spoke as calmly as before. "Miss Romney, I have been a coward. I have let

things go. But it is so hard to struggle with ill-health."

"Indeed—indeed it must be so," said Edith, with all the tenderness and compassion of strength for weakness.

"When I first came I found it such a change from what I had been used to. There was so much to do—so many wearing duties to the parish and the people and the house. I did begin; I meant to try and do my best; and then came weakness and ill-health, and I gave way at once in sheer despair. All my time seems to have been taken up with weakness and illnesses. And I am so tired now—too tired to care to live. I am tired of the sofa, tired of the dull room, tired of sickness, and tired, oh, so tired! of this terrible weakness. There are some women who have far more to do than even I needed to do, and they look after house and servants, and take pains, ah, such pains! with their children. But I—I never faced things bravely. It would have been better for me, better for him,—I have not been just to him—if I had. I know I shall go soon—still I would rather die of anything than this. If I could get a *little* well after the baby is born, for a short time, and then—but yet I do not expect even that."

"You are nervous—that is all. But if you have that fear," said Edith, hesitatingly, "would you feel more confidence in some one else?"

"Don't you know me better than that? That is not like you," said Mrs. Stanforth.

Edith coloured and looked away. Was it altogether her fault that she had uttered this mistrustful little speech?

Mrs. Stanforth squeezed her hand in silent sympathy. She guessed something of the hard struggle which was beginning.

"I will only have you," she said, gently. "I have more than confidence—I love you, and I want you to be with me. Still I believe it is selfish of me. You should not have a bad case just now. If it goes against me it will go against you too."

"No, no, you must not imagine that," said Edith, eagerly. "And," she added, in a lighter tone, "if I am still to be your doctor you must obey me. You must drive away all these morbid fancies, and make up your mind to get strong and well."

"Very well; I almost believe I can when I look at you," was the wistful answer.



CHAPTER XV.

OSCAR HEARS AN OLD SONG.

“Nor lack'd his calmer hours device or toy
To banish listlessness and irksome care.”

Wordsworth.

“I think myself something of a judge—at least I know what pleases myself.”—*Vicar of Wakefield.*

“HERE is a note from Mona asking us for this evening,” said Winifred, at dinner that morning.

“I can't go,” said Edith. “I have promised to go to the Rectory. Mrs. Stanforth is all alone. I am glad you will have some amusement while I am out.”

“Mona should give rather longer notice,” said Winifred.

“I suppose it is one of those impromptu affairs Mr. Milward has got up.”

The Milwards lived in No. 1, the large house at the corner of Princess Road. They seldom ventured on dinner-parties, preferring instead informal “evenings” and supper. And these

evenings were very pleasant and popular. Mona, it is true, was too indolent to exert herself much; but she had a knack of getting together the handful of people among her acquaintances who were interested in each other for the time, or likely to be interested, and her frank easy manner and floods of nonsense effectually banished restraint and stiffness,—those two enemies to provincial social enjoyment. While her father, if not in the first heat of some new interest, was an all-efficient host, good-humoured, talkative and lively. He was kindness itself, and loved to gather his friends together; only too often he was engrossed in the one caprice of the hour, and then his conversation was a mere repetition of his difficulties or fancied discoveries; or else he attempted to throw an intellectual glamour over the evening by reading aloud a poem, or selections from some well-known author.

On the evening in question Mona told Winifred, who had appeared in good time at her friend's request, that they had very narrowly escaped "Comus."

"We were to take parts," she said. "Papa was delighted at the opportunity as both you, Mr. Ardley, and Dr. Fane would be here, and I had great difficulty in persuading him to post-

pone the dramatic reading to another occasion. Fortunately, the delights of homœopathy have not quite lost their power, and the exhibition of the medicine-chest promised great enjoyment. Papa thinks it will be a peculiarly appropriate and flattering way of entertaining Dr. Fane; but if either of you two lay-people should be indulged with a glimpse, pray stretch a point and admire very heartily."

Both Winifred and Oscar gave assurances of their willingness to do so.

"Thanks," drawled Mona, languidly. "If the medicine chest falls flat nothing will avert 'Comus.' By-the-by, I haven't seen you since that happy meeting in the library last Saturday, have I?" to Winifred.

"No; you called on Tuesday, but I was out."

"I was equally unfortunate that day," murmured Oscar, who was standing beside her.

Winifred glanced up with a shy smile, which was very bright and sweet, when he said that. She remembered how glad she had been to see his card, and how sorry to miss him.

"I wanted to tell you about the end of my experiences at Spencer's," went on Mona. "You saw the fair stranger there, of course?"

Winifred assented, a little nervous at the mention of the unknown lady before Oscar.

The approach of the Warrens was welcome to her, at least. There was some hand-shaking, and loud laughter on the part of the three tall dashing girls, and then they sank rustlingly into chairs to listen to Mona.

"Now, my dear girls, don't interrupt," said Mona, admonishing them with her fan. "Listen, and be thankful I have something interesting to tell you. No sooner had you gone," turning to Oscar and Winifred, "than my revered parent presented himself. Instead of making an abject apology at once for his abominable unpunctuality, he leads in Dr. Fane and introduces him to me with an ingenious rapidity. Then, whom should the fair unknown prove to be but Miss Fane. On the coming of this fact to light another happy introduction took place. Papa beamed, and clasped her hand with the ardour of a man welcoming his long lost niece. He glanced wistfully at me, but I was not prepared for raptures, so we merely bowed like English Christians. But no doubt, Winnie, you already know that she was Miss Fane—I saw that you and she were not 'first acquaint' then, Mr. Ardley."

"No. I met her in London last year," he said, indifferently. The shock of surprise was over. He had prepared himself for the mention

of Sibyl's name, knowing well how much talk would be caused by her visit to her brother.

"Ah, then you will have the pleasure of renewing your acquaintanee this evening. Old friends always delight in talking over old times, do they not?" asked Mona, smiling maliciously.

"Always," said Oscar. "It is the most refined pleasure known to human beings."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Mona. "Then if I stare at you very hard while you and she are talking, you will know I am trying to see the effect of this refined pleasure upon the human face divine. I expeet transfiguration at least, Mr. Ardley—pray prepare your broadest smiles. If the small drawing-room was not sacred to homœopathy and the medicine-chest, you should retire there and talk undisturbed. We shall all feel quite melancholy under the hail of 'Do you remember?' and 'Ah yes—and that other day'—ete.—ete.'"

"There's nothing more objectionable than that sort of thing," said Reginald, who only heard the last sentence. "Society is a sham and a humbug, but there is truth in the etiquette that forbids a husband and wife, or members of one family, to enjoy conversation together when in society. The very essence of social courtesy consists in politeness to strangers, and in

introducing only general topics, and, therefore, logical sequence would condemn private conversation between two old friends just as much as between husband and wife."

"Our course then is clear," said his sister. "We must sacrifice anything rather than fail in carrying out the logical sequence of true social courtesy. Reginald, please place the most comfortable chair in the middle of the room. Miss Fane shall sit there, and we old friends will surround her and speak to her in turn on general topics carefully chosen, and given out by Reginald. Let me see, weather first of course. Then—"

"Wanningster," suggested Winifred.

"Yes; oh, there will be much to say on that subject! Does she like what she has seen of it? Doesn't she think the public buildings rather good for a provincial town? Does she not find the streets shorter, narrower, cleaner, quieter, than those of London; the walks—etc., etc? But we must be provided with far more subjects—a pause would be so very awkward. Her favourite authors, musicians, artists—"

"This year's Academy," added Winifred.

"The fashions," cried Miss Warren, laughing loudly.

"Tennis," added the second girl.

"Thanks, yes," said Mona. "Reginald, you

are jotting these down, I hope? And then, to show we take a little interest in the nation's affairs, we must throw in a spice of politics. What do you think of the 'State of Ireland?'"

"Perfectly inexhaustible!" said Oscar.

"Rational conversation on this system is utterly out of the question," said Reginald, in a tone of disgust.

"Have you called on Miss Fane, Mona?" struck in Louisa Chutterworth, who had joined the group, and was leaning over the back of Miss Warren's chair. She did not understand these last remarks, and burned to hear more on the interesting topic of the new doctor's sister.

"I have," said Mona. "It was papa's doing," she added, turning to Winifred. "Since that cold of his ten days ago, which he vows he cured with some wretched homœopathic tincture, he feels grandly independent of medical advice, and, as a consequence, he is beautifully impartial about the merits of all doctors. His house he declares is neutral ground. In reality, you know, he is comparing himself to one of the magnificent patrons of old, who patronised artists of various schools. This explanation, Winnie dear, will prevent any little feeling of reluctance you might feel otherwise in meeting the person a common friend of ours has aptly termed a

‘new medical star.’” This friend was of course Mr. Chutterworth, but Louisa did not recognise her father under Mona’s periphrasis. “Let us hope,” she added, “he will prove merely a shooting star.”

“Can’t you tell us anything about Miss Fane?” pouted Louisa. “What is she like? Papa told mother she had to call upon her, so she’ll be going in a day or two. Jack saw her walking with her brother one day, and he says she’s an ‘awful stunner.’ And Mrs. Ardley called yesterday, and came on to tell us, and she said she’d never seen any one like her.”

“Then I am sure you don’t need any feeble description I can give you,” said Mona. “Have a little patience and you will be able to judge for yourself.” Oscar had turned to Winifred when Louisa brought the talk back to Sibyl, and had begun a low under-toned conversation. He spoke quickly, and addressed her as if to cut her off from the others. He seemed nervous, and some of his remarks were at random—facts which caused her a confused pain.

Mr. Milward entered in a cheerful bustle, and his cordial greetings broke up the group. The Chutterworth girls seized on their dear friends, the Warrens. More people came in, and Mona moved to receive them. Jack made his appear-

ance in an exceptionally uncomfortable collar, so that he had greater difficulty than usual in maintaining a demeanour of easy elegance, and his would-be happy smile was distressingly constrained. Mona regarded him with proportionate disfavour. She allowed him the grace of touching her finger-tips, and then turned her shoulder so decidedly that poor Jack could only sink into a chair and gaze at her in mute appeal.

"What a lovely day it has been, Mr. Chutterworth," said Miss Warren, smiling her most amiable smile.

"Has it? I don't know," was the helpless rejoinder.

Oscar had found Winifred a seat in the bay-window, rather apart, and had placed himself near, leaning forward with that new air of warmth and devotion which was partly delightful and partly embarrassing to her.

"I was so sorry to find you out on 'Tuesday,'" he said, earnestly.

"I was sorry to miss you," said Winifred, shyly.

"I wanted to see you particularly," said Oscar, looking into her eyes. "I had something to say."

She could only meet his glance for a moment—the words, and, above all, a certain significance in his way of saying them, made her heart beat

fast and her colour waver. It was impossible to say simply, "What was it?"

She was hesitating, when Osear suddenly raised himself and sat up straight. The quick movement made Winifred look up. He was no longer looking at her, but towards the door. Her eyes involuntarily followed his. Through the doorway came a tall, fair creature in a long sweeping dress of delicate pale green, brightened here and there by narrow golden lines of trimming. There was something attractive in the mere way Sibyl walked, so easily, and with such serenely assured confidence of her reception, as she advanced to host and hostess and greeted them with a frank, pleasant smile. Her brother followed. At first glance, it seemed as if there was not so much as even a family likeness between the brother and sister—she was so exquisitely fair, he so dark; but in certain tricks of carriage and manner they were curiously alike—noticably so in their way of surveying the occupants of the room after hand-shakings were over, with calm and open inspection.

The Fanes were the last to arrive. Tea was brought in, and Mona summoned Mr. Barker and Jack to her aid. While engaged in her tea-making, she could give at best only a divided attention to Miss Fane, whom she had seated

near her, so Sibyl amused herself by speculations about the guests. The fame of the Chutterworths had of course reached her already, and it was not difficult to fix upon the two girls. Louisa was an ideal type of the self-made man's daughter—loud, large, in distressingly gaudy attire, and handsome in a certain coarse red and black style; while Sophy, though somewhat softened down in colour and form, was quieter by such a violent effort of affectation that she betrayed herself. Her dress was an exaggerated imitation of Mona's, and what in Mona was natural languor and dreamy listlessness, caused in great part by ill-health, was caricatured by Miss Sophy Chutterworth. She and her sister, with the Warrens, kept up a fine and vigorous flow of talk and laughter, Louisa's talk being especially voluble, and her laughter especially noisy, as she wished to draw Oscar's attention to her indifference—an indifference somewhat marred, in the eyes of a careful observer, by the angry looks she cast again and again towards the pair in the bay-window.

That pair interested both Sibyl and her brother. Sibyl had caught Oscar's eye as she first glanced round, and had bowed and smiled, receiving in answer a low and stiff inclination. He wishes me to understand I am in disgrace,

thought she, amused, and also that he has found consolation. Fane at once recognised the young lady he had already caught three glimpses of, and as quickly acknowledged her to be the prettiest girl in the room. He had time for no further inspection then, for Mr. Milward seized upon him at once, the sight of the new doctor having revived a fresh impulse of interest in his last hobby. The necessity of at once explaining it to an intelligent listener, even postponed his falling a victim to Miss Fane's charms. The history of his cold, and of the speedy and complete cure effected by the new system, was gone into at length. He playfully declared that now he could be his own doctor, adding that this independence of medical men made him quite unbiassed as regarded persons, and he brought his eloquent peroration to a close in the words Mona used a few minutes ago—that Dr. Fane might regard his house as neutral ground.

Fane did not see the precise bearing of the remark, as he was ignorant of Winifred's relationship to his rival. He smiled, however, and expressed due admiration of the sentiment. He had refused the thimbleful of pale tea offered him by Jack, and Mr. Milward straightway carried him off into the back drawing-room.

Fane had seen several homœopathic medicine-

chests before, and was unable therefore to make the lively demonstrations of wonder and gratification expected from one who is introduced to a new curiosity ; still he admired perseveringly, and, in order to show a discriminating judgment, pointed out one or two minor arrangements as especially deserving of praise. The question, What do you honestly think of homœopathy ? was certainly difficult to answer off-hand, as he had not troubled his head about that system ; but by gravely declaring there was no doubt a great deal to be said in its favour, he pleased his host and escaped further pressing—Mr. Milward being only too ready to expound his own views on the subject. These views were delivered at length, and in a somewhat hopelessly involved manner, and were listened to in outward patience at least by Fane. He submitted with a good grace to this severe victimising, indulging in a little private scoffing at himself for his complacency. He took pains to flatter this bore of a host from motives of self-interest. It was a new, and, being so, rather an amusing experience, this task of ingratiating himself on the score of advisability and policy with these dull, narrow Wanningsterians. There was a ludicrous aspect of the situation which Fane was keenly conscious of—he was almost repaid for

the trouble of his efforts by the fun he got out of his new rôle. Mr. Milward, judged by a professional standard, possessed substantial claims upon his attention—he was a good connection, as Dr. Fullagher had duly explained when instructing his friend.

“Milward,” said he, “is one of the most tedious fools you’ll find in a summer-day’s journey; but he knows about everyone, and is well worth the trouble of securing. Humbug him about his latest mania, and he’ll soon discover you are the one man for the place,—and, what’s more to the purpose, he’ll tell everyone as much, for he’s the most accomplished gossip that ever trod this earth. You needn’t scruple about the openness of the humbug, either. That is one good point about these hobby-riding idiots—you always know how to please them. Give it them as hot and strong as you like, you can depend upon their swallowing it without as much as a pause for suspicion. Men always understand such a natural thing as other folks’ interest in them.”

By the length and warmth of Mr. Milward’s eloquence, and his conscientious explanation of every detail and ingenious contrivance of his medicine-chest; by the number of extracts he read aloud from the book of treatment accom-

panying it, and his anxious craving for information as to whether such and such courses of treatment differed "materially" from the allopathic, Fane was made ruefully conscious of the success of his efforts. His cordial admiration and "sensible remarks"—Mr. Milward's phrase in talking over the evening after—did please. He was certainly rewarded by more than the mere virtue of his act, but, ungrateful man that he was, he hailed the locking of the chest and the cheerfully regretful, "Well, I suppose we must leave science for society," with relief.

His young hostess received him so to speak from her father, and made room for him on the sofa by her side.

"So you are released," she remarked. "I hope you were as enthusiastic as papa wished."

"I hope so, indeed," replied Fane, wondering what manner of girl this was. And while waiting in some apprehension for her next remark, he glanced round the room to see how the other guests were occupied.

Sibyl, of course, was receiving much attention. Young Milward sat beside her, talking in his earnestly priggish manner. His father had immediately crossed the room to them, and was joining in. The curate was treating Sophy, the usual object of his attention, with most reprehensible

neglect, as he leaned forward and hung upon the looks and words of the stranger; while Jack, who stood near Mona, rested his elbow on the mantelpiece and gazed at Miss Fane from afar with an air of dazzled wonder. Fane, intensely amused, glanced quickly at the next group. The pretty girl who interested him most was in possession of the piano, having evidently just finished a song. He could see her face in profile as she turned to speak to young Ardley, who was leaning over the piano with a very flattering air of devotion; the pretty head and face came out softly in the bright light—the brown hair nestled in a low knot on the neck, the fair cheeks were delicately flushed. She was delightfully pretty! no wonder that young man kept at her side,—Fane would willingly have changed places with him.

“Have you ever heard of homœopathy before?” asked Miss Milward’s lazy voice.

Fane regarded her with serious attention. Was she imbecile? or was her innocence assumed? Something in the sleepy eyes made him take the second view, and he answered gravely, “I have a faint recollection of hearing the word before—in the balmy days of childhood I think it must have been.”

“I wish papa had heard of it when he was a

child, and quite forgotten it. I live in daily fear of poisoning."

"That must be very harassing."

"It isn't an experience to raise one's spirits. Since his memorable cold nothing would satisfy papa but experimenting upon someone else. He had tasted blood," said Mona, in her languid drawl, "and he thirsted for more. Reginald and I have been as closely watched as prisoners convicted of murder. Papa was always something of a fidget over our health, but that mild fidgetiness was sheer neglect compared with the anxious supervision under which we have languished the last ten days. He did his best to persuade us we were ill. Twenty times a day we had to answer a question as to our health. He came back one morning an hour after he started for business—I had looked as if a heavy cold was beginning—a little aconite—But Reginald and I were unfeeling. We wouldn't develop symptoms. This morning at breakfast, however, I sneezed. Up jumps papa, pulls down the bell for water and a glass, and flies to his medicine-chest. I was forced to drink a dose there and then, and papa read aloud several pages from his medical book on treatment of colds. In the middle of his most impressive sentence, Reginald—he's a dear fellow

sometimes, and I believe his conduct on this occasion was actuated by the sympathetic determination to share my danger—sneezed violently, twice. Papa was in an ecstasy, and Reginald was at once supplied with all he needed. There were two victims for experiment now, and with great difficulty we induced papa to leave us and go to business. We managed to make him see that our condition was not yet critical enough to require constant watching, and he yielded at length, forbidding Reginald, however, to accompany him. Reginald basely took advantage of his holiday to go bicycling.”

“I don’t think you need be afraid of being poisoned,” said Fane.

“Ah, there spoke professional contempt! To tell the truth, as soon as I tasted—I mean as soon as I drank the dose papa gave me, my fears vanished. I have no respect for a medicine that doesn’t contort the face for at least five minutes after swallowing—and I don’t think many people have. The nastier the drug, the more efficacious, isn’t that the case?”

“It is the invariable rule,” he replied.

“It is rather strange then that you allopaths ever lose a case,” mused Mona.

Fane laughed.

“Ah,” said Mona, “I see you are looking

towards the other end of the room. Do you know all the people?"

"Not by any means. I shall be grateful if you will enlighten me regarding some. Who is that young lady in white?"

"Miss Noel. Would you like an introduction?"

Fane confessed to the pleasure an introduction would give him.

Mona composedly fanned herself. "I'm afraid the pleasure is in the category of forbidden ones."

"Indeed!"

"I am very sorry for you," said Mona, wickedly. "She is the nicest girl here—leaving out Miss Fane, of course—I am speaking of the Wanningster girls. She is mine own familiar friend, a recommendation which speaks for itself, and *so* pleasant to talk to."

"And why must the pleasure be denied to me of all men?"

"The fate of war, Dr. Fane. It is not my fault, I assure you. From time immemorial custom has required enemies to be on hostile terms with each other."

"I wish you would give me the answer to this remarkable riddle."

"Do you really not know who she is?"

"You have told me her name, but that does not explain her enmity to me."

"Perhaps the fact of her being Dr. Romney's niece does so?"

"Oh!"

Mona's eyes were sharp enough to see the quick little contraction of the brows which received her announcement. However, he laughed. "But this is neutral ground, Miss Milward—may we not put aside our enmity here?"

"The experiment seems too dangerous," she said. "You can't expect her to indulge the sentiments of love and joy towards you." She suddenly turned upon Jack. "Mr. Chutterworth, it is time you did something to amuse the company—you have been idle long enough. Go and sing."

"I will," said Jack, noways discomposed, "if you'll play the accompaniment."

"No conditions! Ask Louisa."

Jack sauntered towards the piano, which Winifred had left some minutes before.

"Mr. Jack appears to be in good training," observed Fane, amused.

"Wait till you hear him sing," replied Mona composedly.

That pleasure was to be deferred, however. Mr. Milward was in the act of leading Miss Fane to the piano, and Jack drew back with polite alacrity. Sibyl seated herself, unclasped a heavy

bracelet, and laid it on the piano, while she listened to some remarks on music from her host; for Mr. Milward, in his character of general and all-knowing critic, had much to say on this art. He disposed of classical music in the lump somewhat slightly as being unintelligible, decided that the great masters were immensely and insincerely over-rated, and owned to a partiality for a lively style of music with a distinguishable air. Having shown that his opinions were not mere echoes of other men's, but valuable as being sincere and original, he added, "What I strongly object to in so many compositions is the repetition. The main idea is repeated to excess, and it seems to me very unnecessary—it shows, too, such a distressing paucity of invention. Of course songs are different."

"Ah, I am glad you think so," said Sibyl. "I was wondering what I could sing—let me see." She paused a moment or two, musingly, with jewelled fingers straying over the keys. She remembered the days last year, when her voice had power over Oscar Ardley—when she had made him flush or pale, or had even brought tears to his eyes, as she liked. Was all her power a thing of the past? How he had hung over the piano when she sang! How passionately

his eyes had rested on her face or been lowered upon her fingers,—an impulse of mischief came to her. She would like to test him, just for curiosity's sake. He had held aloof from her—he had not even spoken to her yet—such neglect was surely too studied for indifference. A light little smile curved her lips and she began. She sang a sweet pathetic air, and when it was over and Mr. Milward entreated rapturously for another, she chose one of Oscar's old favourites. She had no wish to revive the old passion by any means, still less did she think of luring him back from his new love,—she merely followed the moment's impulse.

Oscar and Winifred, with Reginald, made a gay little group rather near the piano. Young Milward had by this time so far unbent to the frivolity of the hour that he condescended to utter a pleasantry about Oscar's ignominious submitting to harness.

"The day of Wauningster's commercial prosperity has dawned," said he. "Manchester may look to itself."

"It has always done that," replied Oscar. "The fact is, Miss Noel, this is envy—the wildest envy. Milward has been able so far to cut a not altogether despicable figure in the—let me

see, field of commerce is the proper expression, is it not?"

"My department resembles a cellar more than a field," said Reginald. "Arena's a good-sounding word—but any will do, as Mr. Chutterworth is not here to appeal to."

"I have heard him call it the ocean of commerce," said Winifred.

"Ocean suggests such physical discomfort," objected Oscar. "But of course such a successful authority as Mr. Chutterworth is not to be disputed. As I was saying, Milward so far has managed very creditably, but, as is only natural, he—"

It was then Sibyl began to sing. Oscar broke off his speech, started, and cast a swift glance towards the piano.

"I am glad modesty checks you in time," said Reginald, laughing. "Of course you know what he was going to say, Miss Noel?"

"I think I can guess the drift," she managed to say.

Oscar appeared to have forgotten them. He jerked his chair forward to a table very near, and leaning his elbow on it, began turning over an album. During the second song he gazed unseeingly at one page, forgetting to turn the leaf. The first note of the familiar voice had

thrilled him deeply. He was carried back to other evenings—evenings when he was so full of love and ardour, of hopes and fears, when the moments spent in her society had been crowded with such confusions and raptures, such tumults of pain and sweetness. The months of recovery since fell away, and he was once more in those days. Oh, that dear, sweet voice! it swept the strings of his heart as a musician sweeps the strings of a harp. And then it stopped, and the tumult it had raised began to be felt consciously.

Sibyl rose and smilingly received the thanks of the company as she reclapsed her bracelet. She paused, glancing round with an air of choosing a seat. Her eyes met Oscar's as she made her frank survey, and she was struck by the pale look of his face. He got up and offered her a chair near.

"Thank you, Mr. Ardley," said Sibyl, sinking into it, and as she bent slightly to draw her shining train a little forward she swept a bright, kind look and smile up at him. For a moment Oscar hesitated, and then with an abruptness of movement unlike his ordinary languor, he took the seat beside her, while Mr. Milward called upon the two eldest Miss Warrens for a duet.

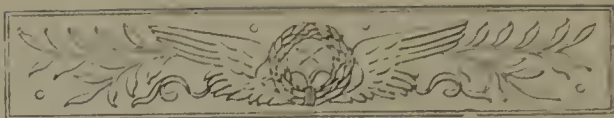
It was impossible for Winifred to avoid seeing this little scene. When a gentleman breaks off

in the middle of a remark to a lady and turns pale because another lady begins to sing, his behaviour cannot escape notice. Winifred turned pale, too, with a sick faintness that frightened her. She looked down feeling that it was hateful to watch Oscar; she would have liked to move away, but Reginald was fast on her other side, and had already launched forth into a glowing account of his morning's bicycling. And the girl, shaken and miserable with the strange new trouble and pain, kept her eyelids lowered, not daring to move or look up, hardly to breathe, appearing absorbed in the exciting adventures (consisting chiefly of tumbles) her companion was recounting. She was conscious of a thrill of relief when the clear voice stopped singing. An oppression seemed removed, and she felt she could breathe more easily. She moved a little and glanced up unintentionally as she did so, and then she saw Oscar surrender, as it were.

"Not a bad morning's work, was it?" said Reginald, cheerfully, rising to go and do his duty elsewhere.

"Very good, I think," said Winifred.

Next moment Mona spoke to her friend. "Winifred, this is Dr. Fane. Miss Noel, Dr. Fane," and Winifred turned to bow to her aunt's rival.



CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. LORIMER IS DISPLEASED.

"In our bad world respect is given where respect is claimed."
"Good-natured Man."

"THE Lorimers are at home," said Edith, next morning at breakfast, refolding a sheet of thick note-paper adorned with an elaborate crest and address, and written over in large bold writing.

"Ah," said Winifred. "I wonder what Mrs. Lorimer will think of the latest addition to the inhabitants. She will have much to say on the subject."

"I fear so," said Edith, somewhat ruefully.

"I wonder if Violet is engaged," mused Winifred.

"Most probably," was the absent rejoinder. Edith finished her letters and pushed them away. "I was too late to hear about your evening last night, Winnie—how did it go off?"

"Very much as all the Milwards' evenings do. The Fanes made the chief variety."

"They were there? What is Miss Fane like?"

"Oh, she seems to be charming—a wonderful difference to Wanningster young ladies. She is tall and fair, with the loveliest complexion and the brightest hair. It was fine to see the Chutterworths and Warrens! They examined her and looked as much alarmed as though she were some strange animal. Her manners are delightful."

"I should like to see her," said Edith.

"And, in a man's way, her brother is as attractive," added Winifred. "His manners are the most charming of any man's I have seen. That tiresome Mona introduced him to me, so I had a fair opportunity of judging."

"Then you liked him?"

"On the contrary,—I dislike him so much the more for his good looks and agreeableness. Finding him so likeable made me angry with him."

"You foolish child!"

"I agree with Mona that his attractions will make him a more dangerous rival to you,—so of course I grudge them to him."

"Ah, well," said Edith, rising from the table. "When the weather is as exquisite as it is this morning, and I have a full day's work before

me, I can't find it in my heart to grudge him any of his advantages. I had such a lovely walk on the race-course before you were up, Winnie. The air was delicious—so fresh and misty in the early sunshine. I don't think it will be so hot to-day. You must take holiday, and spend as much time as possible out of doors. Suppose you drive with me to the Hall?"

"I think I would rather stay in till this evening. My head aches."

"Does it? Poor darling!" Edith leaned over the back of Winifred's chair and laid a cool gentle hand upon the hot brow.

The girl elosed her eyes restfully. "One must pay for dissipation," she murmured.

"I am afraid you did not enjoy your dissipation."

"Yes—really," said Winifred, quickly, with almost eager assurance. "The Milwards were as kind as possible. It was very lively, and"—laughing—"we escaped 'Comus'."

Edith regarded her with grave solicitude. "I fancied something might have vexed you," she said.

"What could vex me?" said Winifred. "I was honoured next to Dr. Fane himself. He was the first to see the medicine-chest, but I was second."

It was not easy for Winifred to avoid Edith's anxious gaze and to answer thus. She felt almost guilty. This was the first time she had had anything like a secret from Edith, and it seemed unnatural and wrong. She had to restrain a strong impulse to pour it out as she used to pour out every little trouble and event of her childhood. The habit of depending upon Edith for advice and help in every difficulty had grown up with her, and it was strange to have a difficulty which could not be so comfortably lightened. She knew instinctively that she must bear this alone. The discovery of her feelings towards Oscar had been a happiness too precious and sacred to be spoken of, a something to be hidden deep in her heart, hardly to be dwelt on even when alone—so new and tender, too, the freshness and wonder had clung about it till last evening—and after last evening, what had she to tell? Her joy and pride were changed to a miserable pain and perplexity. Her wounded pride—she was too bewildered to know how deeply wounded it was—prompted her to profess herself unhurt and light of heart. She did not know yet what had happened to her—she could not tell how far she would be affected by this strange acquaintance between Oscar and Miss Fane. Had he cared for her

last year? she asked herself when Edith had gone and she had taken her sewing into the drawing-room, which faced north and was cool and pleasant. Was a former love the explanation of his curious behaviour? Perhaps he cared for her still—the work dropped from Winifred's hands, and a scared look came into her pretty eyes, the tender, youthful face grew white and piteous under the sudden pain. If so, if he *did* care for her, if he had cared for her all this time, what had he done to *her*, Winifred? She had thought he—loved her, and was seeking her love, while—if this horrible thing were true—he had only been—playing with her. The thought was intolerable! The sensitive, delicately-brought up girl, who knew nothing of the easy intercourse between young men and young ladies which goes under the name of flirtation, who had thought of no man's admiration till she found this sacred flame of love burning so clearly in her heart, shrank in an ecstasy of insulted dignity from the mere idea of having afforded this kind of amusement. She felt even a strong revulsion from Oscar himself, and a sudden terror came over her at the thought that her love might be killed because it was given so mistakenly. It was a moment of such new and exquisite anguish that she sank from her

chair, threw her arms out upon the seat of another near, and hid her quivering face upon them. Not that! not that! anything but that!—she could not be so utterly deceived. He would come soon—he would explain. He could not deceive her. It was impossible to suppose he could treat her so slightly. Would he have sought her out on the race-course the evening after that first meeting in the library, had he not thought of her in all good faith?

Meanwhile, Edith was on her way to Bycroft Hall, nearly four miles from the town, the residence of Mrs. Lorimer, whom Dr. Fullagher had styled “our great lady.” That phrase would have gratified her extremely, and would have struck her as being eminently true; so well aware was she, and so thoroughly did she make others aware, of her pretensions to the position of great lady of the district.

The late Mr. Lorimer had been the conservative member for Wanningster for some three or four years, and Mrs. Lorimer carried about with her the inspiring and elevating consciousness of that never-to-be-forgotten distinction. She had lived up to the privileges conferred by that great fact even since her husband’s death, and she now took her season in London as regularly as spring came round. This acquaintance with

the fashionable world, and the extreme reserve she considered necessary to show towards the townspeople, won for her great honour and esteem.

In spite of this reserve, however, Mrs. Lorimer was too active-spirited not to take an interest in the town's affairs. She determined upon the immeasurable distance between herself and the inhabitants being quite understood; yet, at the same time, the immeasurableness must have a certain limit to be properly appreciated. She had no intention of putting herself altogether above the reach and sight of her provincial neighbours; there must be a bond of interest between herself and them, otherwise she would be restricted to the comparatively cold delights of being only one—and by no means an important one—amongst the county people. Mrs. Lorimer possessed impulses and powers which forbade so tame a level. She loved to manage, to govern, to be first. The consciousness of superiority was not enough,—she liked to feel the exercise of it in personal contact with the less fortunate ones of the world. She took an interest, decided and authoritative, in the town's affairs; her name was on all the committees for charitable objects; in short, she patronised both town and people, and the people submitted to

her patronage as willingly as it may be supposed the children of Israel submitted to be set dancing on a memorable occasion.

In such general patronage the medical profession took as a matter of course an honourable place.

Miss Romney set up at a happy moment, for Mrs. Lorimer was then beginning to find that her health needed more constant medical attention. Dr. Fullagher was too well established, too old an institution altogether to be patronised, and too independent, moreover, to suit the great lady's idea of their relative positions ; but a new doctor, a lady-doctor, was a splendid subject to take up. And Mrs. Lorimer did take it up. She determined to exercise her influence in favour of Miss Romney ; her neighbours should have an example of strength of mind and broadness of view set before them. Unlike Mrs. Stanforth, she did not even inspect Miss Romney before she took the momentous step of employing her. Mrs. Lorimer talked much of her change of doctor both in the town and in the country. She praised Miss Romney in something of the style a discovery is praised which reflects credit upon the discoverer ; she predicted a great success for the young doctor, and the popularity of her *protégée* she set down entirely to these

efforts of hers—the very flattering proof of the weight of her influence, and a token of the becoming respect in which her neighbours held her. This happy and proper result of course increased her goodwill towards Edith, and it was to be supposed that on hearing of the change that had taken place during her absence and the lessening of Edith's popularity, her sentiments would be of decided displeasure.

The Hall was a large, grey, old-fashioned house, standing in grounds of fair extent. Edith, on fine days, left her brougham at the gate, for she liked the walk up the drive curving through the well-kept garden and shaded by graceful elms.

She was shown into the library that morning, and the servant went to tell his mistress. The room was not empty. From the window-seat at the end a young man raised himself, and came forward to meet her as soon as she entered. He had watched her approach. This was Bertie, the only son.

Edith had met him once before about Christmas time, and she was surprised to find herself so well remembered. Young Lorimer appeared slightly embarrassed, but shook hands with pleasant warmth and looked eagerly at her as he remarked how awfully hot she must find it out.

Edith assented and inquired after Mrs. and Miss Lorimer.

"Mother will be here directly. She's rather knocked down by the heat in London," said Bertie. "Town gets awfully close this time of year. My sister's very well, thanks."

Edith expected he would then depart, having very creditably faced her so far; but Bertie appeared in no hurry. He gave Miss Romney a chair, and made a remark or two about the beauty of the country, and how pleasant it was after broiling in London. A large bowl of roses stood on the table, and Edith's eyes rested admiringly upon them.

"How sweet they are!" she exclaimed in a pause.

Bertie's hands were at once upon the flowers. He pulled out a fine large-petalled half-blown blossom of delicate yellow, and offered it to her.

"That's a very sweet kind," he observed, accompanying the gift with a shy, yet eager, look of admiration at her face.

Edith did not see the glance, and she accepted the rose with an easy smiling, "Thank you."

Firm footsteps were heard crossing the hall, and Bertie held out his hand again.

"Here's mother. Good morning, Miss Romney," and as Mrs. Lorimer entered by the door

he walked out through a window opening on to the lawn.

Mrs. Lorimer was tall and spare, with light hair, faded, and streaked by grey. Her figure and movements were stiff and dignified; her features, large and well-cut; her eyes, cold and searching, and her expression of an uncompromising gravity that verged very often on severity. She spoke in deep measured accents, and gazed unsympathetically at the person she addressed.

Miss Romney's services were required only for herself. She had been, and was still, greatly out of health, she said, and her tone expressed disgust and annoyance at the fact. Business was kept to strictly at first; it was not until all Edith's questions were answered and the prescription was written that Mrs. Lorimer referred to the disagreeable news she had heard since her return home. There was a very perceptible touch of offended authority in the abrupt—"What is this I hear about a new practitioner taking Dr. Fullagher's practice?"

Edith assured her she had not been misinformed.

"I was greatly surprised," said Mrs. Lorimer, in the decided tone of displeasure, "greatly surprised."

More than once her eye had fallen on that rose held lightly in Edith's fingers. How had it come into her possession? The roses were freshly gathered that morning, and only one yellow one amongst them—there was no yellow rose in the bowl now. She did not suppose for a moment that Edith had helped herself to it,—her son must be guilty of the indiscretion of having presented it—she had seen him vanish through the window. It was a stupid indiscretion, and it slightly irritated his mother's temper. Perhaps this irritation prevented her expressing regret at the threatening of Edith's practice. She quite overlooked the probability that Edith possessed a nearer personal interest in the new arrival than herself. It is true, she asked whether Miss Romney had lost any patients, and frowned still more gloomily on hearing that she had; but the question was prompted by the desire to learn how lasting Mrs. Lorimer's own influence had proved to be upon the townspeople, and the frown was the mere expression of her astonished disgust at finding it less than permanent.

"It is the most extraordinary thing," she said, in the extremity of her displeased amazement.

The few Wanningster ladies who were on calling terms at the Hall hastened to welcome

the family back. Mrs. Ardley was one of the first. She kept in favour with Mrs. Lorimer because she was a willing victim to that lady's patronage—her deferential manner always expressed recognition of the other's superiority. She commiserated Mrs. Lorimer greatly for her ill-health.

"You should try our new doctor," she said, and proceeded to give an account of her accident and of Dr. Fane's successful management. She told the story in a way to suggest that while attended by Miss Romney she had lain in a chronic state of cut cheeks.

Mrs. Lorimer listened, gravely thinking.

"You like him?" she demanded, surveying her visitor with her unswerving gaze.

"Oh, very much!" For Mrs. Ardley she was enthusiastic. "And I am sure you would like him, too."

This was presumptuous certainty.

"I am not an easy person to please," stiffly.

"No! of course not. I did not mean that—"

"And it would not do for me to act precipitately in the matter of changing my medical attendant," added Mrs. Lorimer. "I am obliged to be very careful—very careful. I should not like to injure a person's prospects unless I felt

there was just cause. I would rather put up with a little personal inconvenience myself."

Like all conscientious persons, she was profoundly aware of the responsibility of her position. Lesser people changed their doctor for a mere trifle, perhaps, but she, upon whose movements so many eyes must be fixed, must needs do nothing rash. She was deeply conscious of the significant import of the words, "Mrs. Lorimer has given up Miss Romney." No; she could certainly not move as quickly as—Mrs. Ardley, for instance. Still she perceived the awkwardness of clinging too long to a dying favourite, and her feelings towards Miss Romney became subtly affected by a sense of self-denying favour and forbearance in thus continuing to give her countenance. Feeling a little better at the end of a week, she drove into town and made two or three calls. She heard a great deal about the Fanes. The quiet Wanningsterians were startled into a confusion of admiration and wonder by Sibyl, and hardly less by her handsome brother. Nothing so brilliant and astonishing had been seen before in their sedate midst as Sibyl Fane, with her lovely dresses and bewitching manners. Mrs. Warren and her daughters had called one morning and seen her in the daintiest costume of pink and white, with

a coquettish little cap and apron, and had been laughingly told she was learning to cook. And at the dinner-party given by the Chutterworths in honour of the brother and sister, Miss Fane had dazzled all eyes by her exquisite lace and beautiful ornaments.

Mrs. Lorimer listened, amazed, and only half approving.

"That doesn't sound much like the sister of a struggling professional man," she remarked.

"Oh, but they have money," was the eager response.

This particular caused some enlarging of Mrs. Lorimer's ideas about professional men.

"I think you would be delighted with them," went on Mrs. Warren.

"I am not easily delighted." This was spoken with some inward irritation. In truth, the position was disagreeable. Not many months ago she had, so to speak, discovered Miss Romney, and had chanted her praises with a touch of "here is what no respectable family should be without," and an agreeable sense of being in advance of her neighbours. Very sweet had it been to have her advice taken, and it was as bitter to have the tables turned. The respectable families were independently choosing their doctor; she was being advised to give up the

one she had so strongly recommended to them some months before; and the feeling of being behind the times was hers now.

“I wish you could see Dr. Fane,” said Mrs. Warren. “I should like so much to have your opinion.”

This remark was reviving to Mrs. Lorimer’s self-importance. “Yes,” she said, gathering her mantle about her with great dignity. “I ought to see him; I should like to judge whether he is the right man for Wanningster,—outside attractions are not everything. Dr. Fullagher ought to have consulted *me* as to the advisability of introducing a new man to the town. I think I have a right to expect a voice in such an important matter. He has been hasty and injudicious.”

“Yes, perhaps—but I think, I *hope* you will approve, Mrs. Lorimer! I hope you will not think his *choice* injudicious.”

“I hope not, for the town’s sake,” was the sedate answer. “I consider it my duty to call upon Miss Fane—an official call, you know.”

By this high-sounding term—a great favourite with Mrs. Lorimer—she meant generally a call of inspection.

From Mrs. Warren’s she drove to the Bank. She had got into her carriage after transacting

her business, and was about to give the footman the order "Home," when her eye fell on two gentlemen within two yards or so, coming towards her. They were Dr. Fullagher and a stranger. Making an easy guess that the stranger was Dr. Fane, she leaned towards the causeway to draw the old doctor's attention. Dr. Fullagher was discoursing with animation, and mechanically raised his hat. But Mrs. Lorimer beckoned and held out her hand. The doctor withdrew his arm from his friend's, and came to the carriage-side. He was too shrewd not to read something beneath this gracious notice, and it spurred him to soften the sardonic ruggedness of his manner towards the great lady. He was more effusively courteous than he had ever been to her, as he made inquiries after her health and the well-being of son and daughter. Mrs. Lorimer restrained the fulness of answer naturally demanded by a topic so interesting and glanced at Fane, who stood a few paces aside, gazing across the street with quick wide-awake glances, his head a little thrown back.

"Who is your companion, Dr. Fullagher?" she demanded. The question was perhaps admissible from one who knew almost every person of importance in the town at least by sight.

Certainly the doctor was not ill-pleased to answer it.

"My successor, Austin Fane. You have doubtless heard that I have a successor!"

"Yes," said she, with quick directness. She looked from Fane to his friend, but found it not so easy, after all, to make that emphatic declaration of surprise at the march of events. Then time was precious. "Introduce him to me," she said, and Dr. Fullagher repressed the smile which the expected command tempted to his lips, as he turned to Fane and indicated that he was to be presented.

Fane approached, and bowed with easy deferential grace. Mrs. Lorimer addressed two or three abrupt questions to him, accompanying them with a steady gaze of frank inspection which would have driven a nervous man to the verge of awkward despair, but which Fane endured with all the composure of a man well aware how admirably his appearance could bear the test. He inspected in turn, though with a less open directness.

"Tell your sister I shall call upon her," said Mrs. Lorimer, bowing her adieus, and she repeated the remark with a faint wintry smile.

"That is satisfactory," said Dr. Fullagher, as they walked on arm-in-arm, and he allowed the

smile of amusement full play. "As one has to make one's bread out of fools, it's as well the most important one should shed the light of her countenance upon you at an early date."

"I am consumed with regret," exclaimed Fane.

"Ungrateful sinner! why?"

"Because I did not put my best coat on this afternoon. I feel as if I had been photographed in a peculiarly trying light, and one always puts on one's best to go to the photographer's."

"You can put your best coat on when she calls you in," said the doctor. He glanced at his friend. "I am not ashamed of being seen with you, so I don't think she would find much amiss."



